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THE HĀTANEE



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THE HÀTANEE



FIRST EDITION . . . *January* 1906
REPRINTED *February* 1906





Frontispiece *Catherine A. Eggar-Banks*, del.

MĀ PWĀ CHO—THE PAGODA-SLAVE



THE HÁTANEE

A TALE OF BURMAN SUPERSTITION

BY ARTHUR EGGAR

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1906



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PRINTED BY
HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LD.,
LONDON AND AYLESBURY.

657100 - 534

PREFACE

THE following appeared in a Rangoon newspaper at some time during the year 1902:

THE MURDER AT YENAMA.

Our correspondent at Thayetmyo sends us an account of the extraordinary outburst of homicidal mania in Yenama, on Monday last, which resulted in the murder of the Burmese woman, Ma Ma Gyi.

It appears that the whole village, without provocation and for no conceivable reason, set upon the unfortunate woman and pounded her to death with bamboos and stones; but the motive for the crime remains enshrouded in mystery, for the victim, Ma Ma Gyi, was a woman of high repute in the village, and much respected for her charity and "works of merit." . . . Her relatives, too, are strangely reticent upon the matter, and the only explanation that the police have been able to extract from the villagers is the absurd statement that this woman had developed some occult power by which she could transform herself into a tiger at night-time.

The "motive remains enshrouded in mystery," for the Burman has an unfeigned horror of

speaking on the subject of this haunting terror. Fear holds him tongue-tied, for the very whisper of the name of the dreadful Thing, if overheard, would entail disastrous consequences.

As to the origin and grounds of this belief, I have no material from which to form an opinion; but the extract quoted above and my own personal observations testify to the fact that the superstition has a firm hold in the Burman's mind. With bated breath and nervous, but earnest manner, my several informants related the details to me. I submit, however, that I am in no way bound to secrecy, and the risk of making this disclosure rests entirely on myself.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	1
I.	PAGODA-SLAVES	7
II.	A RANGOON BOARDING-HOUSE	14
III.	A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE	23
IV.	A FELLOW-SPORTSMAN	29
V.	A JUNGLE VILLAGE	37
VI.	THE SHWAY DAGÖN PAGODA	43
VII.	A CANOE RACE	50
VIII.	EAST *v.* WEST	64
IX.	PWĀ CHO, THE PAGODA-SLAVE	70
X.	AFTER THE RACE	74
XI.	A DACOIT	77
XII.	DRIVEN OUT	87
XIII.	THE HUT IN THE CLEARING	95
XIV.	A JOURNEY TO TANBIN	105
XV.	THE REST-HOUSE	109
XVI.	A "CONVERT"	115
XVII.	NĀTS	123
XVIII.	JUNGLE-FOWL	131
XIX.	PITFALLS	135
XX.	THE HĀTANEE	148
XXI.	THE TIGER	159

CHAP.		PAGE
XXII.	The Woman	170
XXIII.	Up a Tree	181
XXIV.	The "Thing" Itself	192
XXV.	A Vigil	200
XXVI.	A Tragedy	205
XXVII.	A Friend in Need	211
XXVIII.	Discoveries	217
XXIX.	The Last Spurt	226
XXX.	Conclusion	234

THE HĀTANEE

INTRODUCTION

In the "Toung-ya"—in the Clearing
On the hillside of the forest,
There's a hut of grass and bamboo
 Raised aloft on four supports.

Standing close beside the jungle—
As a sambur, that has ventured
From the covert to the open,
 Still and silent stands at gaze—

Looking forth across the valley
To the hills that rise beyond it
Densely covered with the forest,
 Like a rolling sea of green;

Like a boundless, heaving ocean,
Where the rise and fall of tree-tops
Are the ripples on the surface
 Of the mighty swell of hills,

Where the vulture, like the seagull,
High aloft among the heavens
Sails and hovers, keenly searching
For the flotsam down below;

And beneath the silent waters
Varied kinds of forest-creatures
Seek for food and hunt each other
In the depths of leafy green.

Over this the hut is gazing,
And its mouth is wide and open,
Like a man's, when simple wonder
Changes slowly into fear.

Simple wonder at the greatness
Of the awe-inspiring forest,
And the grim, relentless struggle
'Twixt the creeper and the tree—

Mere amazement quickly passes;
But a wonder at the Reason
And the Cause behind the forces
Lingers ever in the mind;

Till a fearing comes to join it—
Not a fear of common dangers
("Wet" the boar and "Chā" the tiger
May be overcome or shunned)—

But a dread of mystic Beings,
Mindful Things that wield the forces,
Things that man can never conquer,
 Never hope to guard against.

Lives of men They value lightly
As the lives of other creatures:
Hapless men who rouse their anger
 Meet a swift and dreadful Fate:

Death, in many forms, awaits them—
Stealthy tiger, lurking cobra—
And the death has added terror
 When the conscience is oppressed.

Have they shapes—these awful Beings?
Can one see them and avoid them?
Can their anger be averted?
 Have they feelings just like men?

Ask the "Taw-tha" (Jungle-dweller):
He it was who made the clearing,
Scratched the ground, like "Chet" the
 game-cock,
 Dug the roots, like "Wet" the boar.

In the hut beside the clearing
You will find him, sitting silent
As he gazes o'er the valley,
 Chewing betel-nut and thought.

But for answer—see; he glances
At the dark of "Taw," the jungle;
Waves a hand in explanation—
You yourself can see and hear.

(Speech is scanty in the jungle;
For the voice of man betrays him;
Eyes and ears are better trusted—
You yourself can see and hear.)

None can tell you of the feeling
That surrounds the lonely hunter
In the darkness of the game-path
Or the vigil in the tree,

When the silence sinks and settles—
Just as dew that falls at evening
Sinks and settles all unnoticed
Till it gathers into drops;

So the silence settles softly
Till it weighs upon the senses,
And at length the stillness gathers
Into little drops of sound:

Little movements, stealthy footfalls,
Sighs and groans, and sudden snuffles;
While the shadows seem to thicken
And congeal to moving shapes.

'Tis no shape of boar or sambur,
Nor the stealthy tread of tiger:
Something else is creeping softly
In the darkness—'tis the "Nāts"!

All unseen, but ever watchful,
Eyes are peering from the jungle:
Jealous Nāts are quietly stealing
On the hunter unawares.

You may hie you from the jungle,
Hurry fast along the home-path,
But those nimble, trackless footsteps
Patter close upon your heels

Till you gain, at length, the ladder
Of the hut, and scramble up it.
Ah! in vain you seek for safety:
In the houses there are Nāts!

When you check your breath to listen
You will hear that they have gathered:
There's a creaking in the rafters;
Something rustles in the thatch.

Stay! Beware the open spaces
Of the clearing, save at daytime—
Fierce "Thayay" and other demons
Often roam the fields at night.

You may haste you to the village,
Where the huts are thickly clustered
And the ground is trod by men-folk—
 But beware of something worse!

Worse than all the jungle demons
Is the Thing that haunts the village,
Prowling nightly past the houses,
 Smelling round for human blood!

Mark the footprints in the roadway;
Look for pugs of human-tiger;
If you see them, flee the village—
 'Tis the awful "Hātanee."

CHAPTER I

PAGODA-SLAVES

But the gentle mind of the Shakya-muni was offended at the unnecessary cruelty performed on the altars of the gods. He said: "Purify your hearts, and cease to kill; that is the true religion."

PAUL CARUS, *Gospel of Buddha.*

TWENTY-FIVE centuries ago two disciples of Buddha journeyed from India eastward, to carry into unknown lands the teaching of that great reformer; those rudiments of right conduct and simple truths of daily life which lead men of all religions to the true Nirvana—whatever it may be.

After many wanderings, the travellers came at last to the mouth of a great river (which is now called the Irawadi). Here they landed; for their instinct told them that rivers flowed past cities where dwelt men who were waiting for the tidings which they brought. Before they abandoned their ship, they unloaded all their goods; and, selecting such articles as would be useful in their journey up country, they carried the rest to a safe place on

a hill of laterite rock near by, above the reach of the river flood. Here they built a cairn of stones to protect their treasures from the sun and rain and jungle beasts—and thus departed.

Long after, when the Word had spread through all the land, men came to this spot to look upon the sign-post that marked the first beginnings. Round the foot of the hill a village sprang up—a few huts of sticks and grass—and, in the centuries that followed, the river, with unceasing action, laid out broad plains of silt, driving the ocean far away, till now that hill (Dagōn) and the town at its base (Rangoon) stand amid green plain lands, through which the yellow river winds its way by devious paths.

In the meantime pious hands added fresh stones to the cairn, and by degrees the pile grew; till now there stands upon the summit of the hill, the Shway Dagōn Pagoda, whose solid spire towers up to majestic height, covered from point to base with shining gold. It is a land-mark for the country round; the glint of the sun upon its golden sides can be seen for forty miles across the level rice-fields, like a mighty flame on the horizon—a symbol of the fire that those two pilgrims kindled in the hearts of all the people.

It was a doctrine of peace that they taught—peace and goodwill towards everything that

lived; a kindly fellow-feeling for the birds and beasts and fish. And they taught that men should live in harmony, free from all strife—for angry thoughts, if unchecked, will grow like jungle in the mind; and harmful deeds, like ill-aimed shafts, glance back and strike the doer. But men's savage instincts could not all at once be cured, and the Shway Dagōn Pagoda has been the centre of many a fierce fight.

One hundred and fifty years ago the Talaings, who inhabited the delta of the Irawadi, went northwards and conquered the Burmans of Ava, and subjected them. Then a deliverer arose among the Burmans—one Alaungpya (the "God in embryo")—who collected his countrymen and overpowered the Talaings.

The wave of conquest flowed southwards again, and Alaungpya, with his army of savages wild with the joy of slaughter, reached Dagōn. It was a spot that he had, no doubt, often thought of in years gone by, before all this trouble had arisen—before the time when it seemed to him that injustice and oppression called for a swifter retribution than that predicted by the calm, patient Teacher. And here was Dagōn!—the hill and the pagoda that bore silent testimony to the doctrine of peace, and, as it were, raised a finger of solemn

warning at the wrongfulness of strife and bloodshed.

Alaungpya stopped. He told his followers that there should be no more war. It was enough; the object was accomplished, and men should turn again to peaceful occupations. The town at the foot of the hill should be named "Yangōn" (the "End of Strife"), or "Rangoon," as the southerners pronounced it.

"And the captives must be spared—there shall no more life be taken."

What was this strange command? Was the leader mad, or sunstruck?

It was indeed a bold order to issue to the undisciplined mob of followers, feasted with victory and thirsting for revenge. The captives must be spared! The captives who (in accordance with all precedent) were to be led to death by torture—it was the victors' right! They themselves, though victors now, would have silently accepted a like fate if matters had turned out otherwise. They too, but a short while ago, had seen their fathers, mothers, relatives disembowelled and put to death with fiendish devices by these same men whom they now held in their power—these captives taken by dint of hard-won fight—and "the captives must be spared!"

The last order had seemed strange enough:

"There shall be no more war." Men had grumbled; but some had said: "It is good; we have had enough"; others also had said: "It is good—we will rest. In a little while he will lead us again, further southwards, till all the enemy are slain." And so they had obeyed.

But what was this new command? The words passed from mouth to mouth. Here a fierce group, that sat and polished their blood-stained dās with stones, had laughed uproariously, and shouted the message to those near by, who were sharpening the bamboo-stakes upon which the victims were to be impaled. These ceased from their work for the moment, to hand on the jest to those upon the grassy slopes of the pagoda-hill, where they were setting up the crucifixes—bamboos planted in the earth slantwise across each other.

But the order was confirmed. The men began to doubt their leader. They had obeyed him implicitly thus far, for they had trusted to his guidance and judgment in fight; but now—Was he infallible in all things?

"What? Set the captives free? How can there be security if the enemy are left alive?"

"Let us set them free," others said; "they cannot go far—we will see to that—and to-night—Come, gather up the stakes; we will

plant them in a kwin behind the jungle, where the leader cannot see."

And the leader sat in thought, on the summit of the hill, at the foot of the pagoda. Beneath him was the world; but above him, something higher. "There shall no more life be taken": so the Great Teacher would have said. But how was the order to be enforced? The captives were now freed; their bonds had been struck off; but would their lives be spared? There was but one way to make sure—

"The captives shall be pagoda-slaves. They and all their offspring shall be the property of the pagoda, and no man shall dare to lay hands upon them."

Thus their lives were ensured; but in other respects their plight was similar to that of captives taken in war by other nations, in other barbarous times—they had no rights and were outcast. They formed a colony of their own at the foot of the pagoda hill, whence they came and went upon their duties. They were considered more as animals than as human beings; intermarriage with them was, of course, tabooed; and if any man should rashly brave the disgrace and take a fair maid from among them for his wife, he also would be outcast, and his children, too, become pagoda-slaves. Thus they remained a class distinct; and even



at the present day the old prejudice still exists.

At the foot of the eastern slopes of the pagoda hill is the village of Bahān, where (in among the houses of the monks and nuns) are clustered the huts of the pagoda-slaves—the "Payā-joon." The stairways that mount the pagoda hill are lined on either side with booths and shops, where the Payā-joon sell flowers to worshippers and trinkets to children. Under British rule they are free, it is true; but no "free-born" Burman will hold converse with them beyond what is necessary. He would not demean himself by sitting upon their level; and marriage with them would be an unspeakable disgrace. Tales, too, are woven round them: That they eat of the food-offerings left before the shrines (as only dogs and crows would do); and, as all can see, they beg!—a shameful thing. By such tales anxious parents seek to check the rash impetuosity of sons who would marry below their station; but in truth, the maids are neat and comely, and as gentle-mannered as many "free-born" Burmese women.

CHAPTER II

A RANGOON BOARDING-HOUSE

I will extol the homeless life.
Pabbajja-sutta.

THE "Zayāt" was a boarding-house in the cantonment of Rangoon.

It was a tumble-down wooden building, standing in the midst of a jungly compound of betel-palms and mango-trees, at a corner where two long, straight roads intersected each other at right angles, and, judging from the rotten, ant-eaten condition of its woodwork, it must have been more than fifty years old.

Fifty years ago the neighbourhood was rank jungle, saturated with malaria; consequently the only type of house that could be fit for human habitation was one which stood on posts, high up above the level of the fever-mists that rose at night; and teak-wood was the handiest material. Stout posts at the corners; the floor nine feet off the ground; walls of boarding, broken with

patches of venetian shutters; and an outside staircase. Every part was of teak-wood, a rich, dark brown, soaked with petroleum to discourage the voracious white ants. The sloping roof of wooden shingles was stained bright red with "earth-oil," and ornamented with overhanging eaves and fantastic gables of wooden fret-work painted white; and, on the whole, the building had a snug and "home"-like appearance, as it nestled deep among the palms and mangoes, through whose green leaves the golden sunshine of Burma poured in liquid streams.

The Zayāt had originally been erected to accommodate the officers of the British regiment quartered at the Shway Dagōn Pagoda near by; but in later years it had been used for various purposes—a commissariat store, an office, a chummery of merchant men; and now it was a boarding-house, "run" by Mrs. de Souza, a portly half-caste "widow." That good lady had, with commendable enterprise, levelled the earth beneath the house, cemented a floor, and converted the forest of teak legs into a set of rooms by nailing partition-boards across the posts (for Mrs. de Souza's guests increased in number yearly, and were mostly strangers, who knew nothing of the dangers of ground-floor rooms).

It was in one of these lower rooms that Thomas Jackson received his first impressions of Burma. He was lying in a long chair (that indispensable article of Eastern furniture), his legs were thrown up on the rests, one hand stroked a youthful moustache, and the other flicked away mosquitoes. He was apparently deep in thought. We may introduce him briefly, as a Briton of an ordinary type: five foot ten, eleven stone, rat-coloured hair, light moustache, a youthful disposition, and a stock of conversation on the subject of football, oars, and stretchers reeking of the 'Varsity he had quitted a few months ago. But his youth was his chief fault, and "that will wear off in time."

A stroke of ill-luck had swept away his capital just as he was leaving Cambridge, and, dreading the purgatory of office life in London, with its dreary monotony of local trains and hand-bags, he had sunk the remnant of his fortune to try his luck in India. "Thomas Jackson, Esq., B.A. Cant. (Classical Tripos)," ought to find him employment (so he thought); but he was soon to discover that a classical education is by no means the best preparation for a struggle with the world of business life.

In Calcutta he spent four months in a heart-breaking search for work—an educated

white man's work—some respectable work—any work. He was full of energy, and ready to do his best at anything; but alas! his expensive stock-in-trade was unsaleable in the labour market.

It was an unpleasant shock for him to realise that the world had no need of him; and it was still more disquieting to discover, at the end of those four months, that his negotiable capital had ebbed to such an extent that it threatened to leave him stranded. But just in the nick of time an advertisement appeared in the *Englishman*—"Wanted, a lecturer in English, during the absence of the permanent incumbent, at Judson College, Rangoon, Burma." In consequence of which Jackson now found himself lying in a long chair in the Zayāt boarding-house.

.

He screwed his head round to locate the whereabouts of a cough that seemed to be wandering about the room in a disembodied state. A silent-footed Madrassi servant had entered unnoticed, and now stood executing an apology for a salaam.

"Master wanting boy?" the native queried.

"Eh?" Jackson directed his attention to this new and interesting animal—with a turban twisted untidily round oily black hair;

a coat that had once been white; and a dingy "dhoti" hitched up at one side, disclosing a black leg of effeminate development—a fair specimen of the common species of Madrassi "boy" with which Rangoon is infested. In a brown face, deeply pitted with small-pox, a pair of crafty eyes seemed to be continually looking for a way of retreat, and the twiddling toes of one bare foot crawled nervously over and under those of the other.

"Master wanting boy?" he repeated, wriggling uneasily under the scrutiny.

"What's that?"

"Come do master work, sah."

"You want to be taken on as a servant, eh?"

"Yes, sah; I very good servant, sah," he went on volubly, in an evident hurry to get over this part of the business. "Got plenty chit." He dragged from his pocket a handful of dirty bits of paper, purporting to be testimonials from his former masters. He tendered them with confidence—no doubt the price he had paid for hiring them made him feel so assured of the value of their contents.

Jackson took the unclean bunch with delicate finger-tips; but picked out one and unfolded it carefully, with an evident regard for its sanctity. The document contained the following brief statement:—

"EVERSHED'S HOTEL.

"Ramsammy is a Madrassi, with all the original sin of a Madrassi; but at times he can make himself useful.

"In haste.

"JOHN BROWN, I.M.S."

"Are you Ramsammy?" Jackson asked.

It was a "leading question," and the answer "Yes, sah," followed quite naturally. Jackson read the testimonial again with due deliberation; but details of the "original sin" were lacking, and he folded up the paper to investigate the next.

June — 18—.

"I am happy to be able to testify to the good behaviour of Subbaramanya, who has served me faithfully for two years. He is punctual, honest, and scrupulously clean."—"But this can't refer to you," said Jackson, holding up the paper.

"E—yes, sah." Ramsammy seemed to hesitate.

Jackson read the note aloud.

"Yes, sah—that me." Ramsammy visibly swelled up.

"But I thought your name was Ramsammy?"

The Madrassi contracted like a burst bubble;

but, blowing himself out again, he said: "I sometimes called that other name."

The paper was torn, and black with dirt, for most Madrassi "boys" can answer to the name of Subbaramanya ("Lord of angel hosts"), and a document of this nature ranked as a negotiable instrument, though a trifle "dishonoured" by being "overdue."

"The date's too old; it won't do anyhow."

Jackson laid it back on the pile and selected another, which looked a trifle cleaner. The Madrassi had assumed a pose of modest indifference, and fastened his gaze upon a lizard on the wall to avoid the danger of meeting the eye of his interrogator during the ensuing cross-examination.

The next document seemed to require explanation. Jackson turned it over and looked at the back, then at the front again. It ran as follows:

"PEGU CLUB.

"Please give the bearer of this chit a few sound kicks, and tell him if he comes near me again he will get more.

"And oblige

"T. G. T."

Evidently payable to bearer at sight—with interest. Jackson looked at Ramsammy, then

at the lizard, then back to Ramsammy, caught his eye and brought it down to the chit. The Madrassi saw the mistake and sprang back, with his hand tenderly and reminiscently held behind him.

"Not that one, sah," he pleaded. No doubt the baboo in the bazaar to whom he had submitted his chit for an opinion had warned him that it would be useless for ordinary purposes; but Ramsammy had retained it, probably on account of its rarity as a genuine original.

"Well, let's try this one," said Jackson, indulgently. "This one" was in an envelope, and proved to be in a lady's handwriting.

(*No date.*)

"Joseph is a God-fearing boy. He has been with me for nearly six months, and is *so* useful and attentive; and *such* a good cook. He has been a blessing to me with baby in the hot weather, and the dogs——"

"Good God!—who's Joseph?"

"Me Joseph, sah," the Madrassi replied eagerly. "That lady very kind lady."

"Hold on! Are you sure you are Joseph? I thought you were—— Where's that other chit gone?"

"Yes, sah, I Joseph too. Christian, sah; done

plenty baptized. Missionary-padre baptizing, sah."

"How many times?"

"Three, fo', sah. Very good man."

"Ah, I expect he'd give a lot to have another convert like that."

"No, sah. Only giving one rupee." (It was evidently a sore point.) "But I werry good Christian, all-e-same—swear to God."

"Well, well." Jackson idly searched for some testimonial of modern date; but it seemed that Joseph's more recent engagements had terminated too abruptly for documentary evidence.

Suddenly a cracked gong bellowed with pain, as some vigorous hand brutally thrashed its trembling wounds.

"Hullo, what's that?"

"Eight o'clock, sah. Dinner ready quarter-nour."

"Oh, well, take your chits, and start away to open those boxes. Dinner-clothes in that cabin trunk. Here, take the keys and look after them for me; and my money too"—handing him a bag of rupees—"I can't be bothered with it.'



CHAPTER III

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

Let a man cultivate goodwill without measure toward the whole world—above, below, around, unstinted, unmixed with any feeling of making distinctions or of showing preferences.

This state of heart is the best in the world. It is Nirvana !

PAUL CARUS, *Sutta Nipata* (*Gospel of Buddha*).

WITH the business-like expedition of a traveller, Jackson was ready for dinner by the time the agonised gong expostulated for the second time.

In the dining-room, small tables were scattered about on a floor of a curious mosaic, consisting of myriads of fragments of broken china inset into the cement. Small punkahs hung low from the ceiling, connected together in "series and parallel" by a squeaky rope, which led through a hole in the wall to some hidden source of fitful energy behind the partition. A mob of servants, of various tribes, squabbled round the serving-room door, and Mrs. de Souza pushed her way through them to show Jackson his seat, and to tell him

that the other place at his table was reserved for "Mr. Wood."

The guests sailed in one by one, like vultures to a carcase—men of all sorts and sizes, whose employments or callings were for the time concealed beneath conventional dinner-jackets and broad shirt-fronts. A tall man bore down upon Jackson, diving successfully under each punkah except the last, which ruffled his hair and his temper slightly. A weird Chinese oath sprang half-way out of his mouth. He shut his teeth on it, and seemed to shake it like a rat.

"I'm not used to these punkahs yet," he remarked by way of apology.

"Are you new to this country?" Jackson asked, with some surprise, for the bronzed face told of a long acquaintance with tropical sunshine—a clean-shaven chin, short-clipped black moustache, thin nostrils, and eyes screwed up at the corners as if from perpetual sun-glare. The tall figure seemed thin, but the wrists and hands indicated wiry strength and endurance, a man of out-door life and exercise.

"Oh dear, no," he was saying; "I'm by no means new to this country; but I'm a stranger to punkahs just at present, because I have been in the jungle for more than a year. Have you been long in Rangoon?"

"I have just arrived," Jackson replied.

"What are you doing in Burma?" the stranger asked in the abrupt and friendly manner of the East, where fellow-travellers, for however short a while they are thrown together, seek to find some common bond of interest, and are wont to open acquaintance with questions to the point: "Where do you come from? Where are you going? And why?" No man is ashamed of the work he does, nor seeks to hide his identity and social utility under any such formula as "Something in the City."

Jackson was explaining that the excuse for existence in his particular case was "instructing the Burman at the Judson College," when Ramsammy shuffled into the room with a plate of soup. The sight of Mr. Wood seemed to upset the Madrassi's equanimity—he glanced behind him at the door; but Wood's eye caught him and held him. Ramsammy opened his mouth, as if to commence an explanation; but he stood speechless—shifting from one foot to the other—then he retreated slowly backwards, till the punkah knocked his turban off into the soup. He retired hastily to readjust both.

When he returned, he made a wide detour round Mr. Wood, put the soup-plate down in front of Jackson, and took up a position behind

his chair, with arms folded, as if to indicate that he was now in the honourable service of a new master, and in no way concerned with bygones. He gazed at the ceiling with a courageous assumption of indifference. A sudden cough from Mr. Wood made him leap in the air. He quickly recovered his composure, however, and resumed his inspection of the ceiling. It was a hard struggle to prevent his eye meeting that of Mr. Wood, and his gaze continually wandered into the danger zone. He wrestled with it, and held his eye to a beam of the ceiling; but the rebellious optic soon broke loose, and came down on to the table. He yanked it away, ran it over the ceiling and down a side post, and pinned it on the floor. He flicked it up to the ceiling again. It hung on a punkah hook for a moment; then trickled down the rope, till it fell off right on to Mr. Wood, and was frizzled up by the glare from the latter's eagle eye. Ramsammy rapidly melted, dissolved, and slithered away out of the room.

"I suppose," said Jackson, toying with his soup, "it is possible to distinguish one native from another?"

"Eh?"

"I thought you seemed to recognise my man?"



"Yes. Poonasammy and I became acquainted some time ago, and parted by mutual consent shortly after." Wood seemed to chew the recollection like a savoury.

"Ram—— I mean Poonasammy did not show me any testimonial with your signature."

"Indeed, no!" Wood ejaculated in a manner that caused Jackson to enquire "What are his faults? He was 'warranted sound.'"

"His most successful failing," Wood replied, after due deliberation, "is theft. That, however, is connoted by the term 'Madrassi.' But Poonasammy is also a 'native Christian.' That connotes 'drunkenness.'" The audacious Mr. Wood fished in his glass for a "stink-bug" that had taken to drink with disastrous results.

"These Burmans seem a different type of men to the natives of India," Jackson ventured.

"Yes. They can laugh." After a pause, Wood added, "I'd as soon live in a jungle of Burmans as any."

Jackson looked at him critically, and said, "I should imagine you had seen a good deal of jungle-life?"

"It's seldom that I sit down to a civilised meal, with sumptuous appointments like this." Wood turned his glass round to a side that was sufficiently free from chips to admit of

being put to the lips, and raised it to his mouth with evident appreciation. "I'm by way of being a mining-prospector."

"Ah, that must be a grand life!" Jackson exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"H'm—frantic heat and thirst, loneliness and starvation, mosquitoes, leeches, snakes and scorpions, fever, dysentery."

But Jackson's eyes still glowed with some fancy picture. "What are you prospecting for? Gold?"

"Gold—and rubies too." Wood seemed amused at his friend's simplicity, and expanded a little. "If you are interested in rubies—rough uncut stones—I will show you some up in my room after dinner. I have just brought them down from the Mogōk district. I almost had to part with them; for the whole country had scented them out, and all the bad characters in the district used to prowl round my bungalow at night, like a pack of pariah dogs. I know their tracks fairly well by now, and can read their foot-prints as if they were faces. One of the beggars has followed me even here—a man with a deep cut across the sole of his foot; so if you hear a revolver shot in the night you will know what it means."



CHAPTER IV

A FELLOW-SPORTSMAN

Great is the successful general, O Simha; but he who has conquered self is the greater victor.

He whose intentions are righteous and just, will meet with no failure.

Gospel of Buddha.

"BURMA is a civilised country!" Jackson was forced to admit—with some surprise, and not a little disappointment, perhaps—after a month or two in Rangoon. For Burma, to him, was synonymous with Rangoon; and at Rangoon there were lawn-tennis courts, football-grounds, billiard-tables, and, moreover, a boat-club, where fellows could talk of "slides" and "stretchers," "puddles" and "bucketing," and where—though the boats were not of the newest, and men were disposed to take things with more ease than at home—yet, at a pinch, all the enthusiasm of true oarsmen could be relied upon to back up a burst of fanatical energy.

At the end of September there were unmistakable signs of simmering enthusiasm and

energetic preparations, for in a few weeks' time there were to be races on the Royal Lakes, and Burmese canoes from far and wide would gather for the contests in which, also, a "four" of picked oarsmen would take part. Jackson, being one of the four, had just returned home, on a Sunday morning, from a self-imposed training-walk.

On the step of the doorway that led into his room from the verandah outside, he discovered a Burman seated. It was evident, even to the inexperienced eye of Jackson, that this Burman was no ordinary "son of the town"—there was a decided tone of jungle in the dubious hue of the home-washed cotton jacket that clothed the broad, thick-set shoulders; the red head-band was twisted round the top-knot of long black hair in a rough-and-ready manner which betokened none of the niceties of the town; and, moreover, the massive brown legs, with blue-tattooed thighs, were bare—for the red, checked skirt was bunched up round the loins, as if the wearer felt more comfortable when his limbs were free for action.

He rose up as Jackson approached, and let fall the folds of his skirt—not for decency's sake, to cover his legs; but for politeness' sake, to hide his feet, according to Burman custom

—and then squatted down again on his heels, like a frog. Out in the path, a pair of slippers stood disconsolate, side by side, and indicated that their barefooted owner had come to stop for a while.

Jackson stood and regarded the Burman for a moment or two. Time was (a month or two ago) when he looked upon every Burman as a "dacoit"—for he had been fed up with tales of that nature—and for some weeks after his arrival in Rangoon he could not pass a Burman in the road without a tightening of his muscles, like a dog that walks on tip-toe, with bristling hair, when he passes another dog, expecting at every moment to have to fight for his life. But now he had come to know the Burman as a peaceful, good-hearted fellow, with downright human sympathies; and his daily regret was that he could not talk Burmese.

To make up for the latter deficiency he addressed the stranger with an English "Hullo! who are you?" in a cheery tone of voice that conveyed its meaning, regardless of language.

The Burman grunted a similar greeting in the tone of a well-pleased dog, and made a motion with his hands, but remained seated on his heels—that attitude being considered more polite than standing. He moved aside an

inch or two to let Jackson pass, but retained his position in the doorway, from which he had a clear view of all that went on inside the room.

Jackson sat himself comfortably in a chair, and took stock of his new acquaintance, whose broad, brown features, with bulging cheek-bones, heavy jaw, and flat stub-nose—in spite of their somewhat grotesque appearance—spoke clearly of manly qualities. The black, unflinching eyes—that had followed Jackson like the eyes of a full-face portrait—had also taken stock of him in a manner that apparently caused Jackson to become self-conscious, for he checked himself in the attempt to make conversation by childish pantomime, as if he felt that he must be on his most manly behaviour, in order to win the approbation of this "man."

"Well," he asked in English again, "what have you come to see me for?"

The stranger turned his head round the door-post, ejected something from his mouth, and then made remark in full, round tones of Burmese.

Jackson shook his head. "We shall not get along very fast like this," he said aloud, as he looked round for an inspiration.

Just then Ramsammy, the Madrassi, entered the room, and took in the situation. "That

jungle-wallah will not go away," he said in an injured tone of voice. "Long time he sit like that."

"What does he want?"

"I no can understand him jungle-talk. Think him bad man; but no can drive him away—he too strong," Ramsammy frankly admitted.

An idea seemed to have struck Jackson. Making a signal to the Burman to sit where he was, he rose up and left the room. Presently he returned with Wood in tow. "I expect he is a dacoit," the latter was saying. "Shouldn't wonder if he was nosing round after those rubies of mine."

"Will you interrogate him?" Jackson asked, "and be my interpreter? Take that chair." Jackson disposed himself in another chair, and Ramsammy beat a retreat.

Wood, nothing loth to exhibit his knowledge of Burmese, put questions in rapid succession. The Burman answered in monosyllables, until he warmed up to his subject.

"What's it all about?" Jackson interrupted.

"Hold on. I have not got the hang of it yet."

Wood continued the examination for some minutes, and then lay back in his chair to review the evidence, while the Burman calmly

put something into his mouth and commenced to chew, fastening his eyes on Jackson again.

"Jackson, you are rowing in the 'four' that is going to race against the Burmans?" Wood asked.

"Yes."

"Well, it seems that this fellow is expecting to paddle in a canoe of eight men against you. His name is Ba Saw, and he comes from Tanbin (a day's journey up the river); and he says they have got the strongest crew of eight men that ever was seen; and besides that, they will paddle in the 'Shway-Sāt-Daw,' a canoe of world-wide fame—we must take his word for that."

"But the race does not come off till next month. Why is he here now?"

"He just happened to be in Rangoon, and he came to see you."

"Why?"

"That's what puzzled me. But he says he saw your 'four' practising on the lakes, and he was astonished at the speed with which the boat travelled when the oars dipped so slowly. He has, consequently, a very high opinion of your strength of muscle, and he has come to have a look at you."

"You're rotting?" Jackson suggested; but, seeing the denial, he blew out his chest and said, "Good Gad!"

"You ought to be flattered."

"I am. But is that really all he came for?"

"Yes. He wanted to see how big you were when ashore."

"Does he expect to see me strip?"

"He could hardly hope for such good fortune. No. He is simply interested in you as a kindred sportsman."

The Burman began patting his right arm with his left hand, and made some remark.

"He wants to know if you will lay anything on the race," Wood interrupted.

Jackson burst into a laugh, which the Burman evidently construed as boastfulness, for he bared a huge, brown, muscular arm, and slapped it vigorously—repeating his offer apparently.

"Tell him, we who row are not allowed to put money on the race," Jackson said.

Wood interpreted. The Burman subsided, and nodded his head slowly several times, as this extraordinary statement sank into him.

"I have told him," said Wood, with a serious countenance, "that it is contrary to the religion of rowing men to race for money; and he says, 'That is a strange religion; but it is right for a man to stick to his Dharma, whatever it may be.'"

"Hullo! he's going," Jackson exclaimed, as the Burman, with a jerk of his hands towards each of the men, rose up, and sauntered out. "Why is he going?"

"He wanted to look at you. He's done that."

"Well, I'm blowed!"



CHAPTER V

A JUNGLE VILLAGE

Let us live happily then,—not hating those that hate us.
Among men who hate us, let us dwell free from hatred!
Dharmapada (*The Right Path*).
(PAUL CARUS, *Gospel of Buddha*).

THE fierce sun sank in tropical splendour behind the dark rampart of jungle that surrounded the village of Tanbin, and for a short breathing-space the gentle evening paused in its flight before the fast-pursuing pack of night. Bars of golden light shot upwards from the sunken orb in the west, and, arching over the heavens, changed to roseate beams, converging in the purple east; while, wafted overhead like leaves from a forest-fire, the gaunt, black shapes of fruit-bats flapped in reeling flight towards the approaching night.

In the village, round the palm-tree tops, flocks of riotous crows circled in the air, and with noisy clamour argued for right of perch. Diving headlong into the dark mop of leaves, each clumsy bird displaced a dozen others, who

with harsh expostulations trod air with wings and claws, and struggled back to join the mêlée.

On the banks of the river a group of swarthy, brown-backed Burmans squatted on their heels, and shaded their eyes with both hands put together. All looked towards the west, where, far away down the river, the black speck of an approaching canoe broke the smooth surface of the sunset-coloured water. In rapid strokes, the well-timed paddles jerked out from either side of the canoe—flick, dip; flick, dip—like the wings of some dark-bodied bird skimming low along the water.

It was that famous racing-canoe, called Sāt (the "Sambur"), and her crew of eight picked men, who had been chosen to uphold the honour of the village at the races that were soon to take place at the "big-town" of Rangoon. Though far away, one could hear their shout—"Oy-ee, oy-ee, ugh-ah, ugh-ah!"—as they grunted in united effort.

The fierce energy of the digging paddles seemed to electrify even the watchers on the bank, for they rose to their feet, and bent forward with twitching muscles and arms that jerked in sympathy with every stroke, grunting between their clenched teeth, "Ug—ach—they are strong—they are tigers!" There was scarce a man in the village who would not

stake his all to back the canoe—not a man but Ko Chee, the "loo-byo-goung." Ko Chee did not believe in them; and Ko Chee was the "head bachelor"—the popularly-elected chief of the village youths. But everybody knew why he was betting against the crew—it was because his rival, Ba Saw, was the bow-man, and set the stroke. For that reason Ko Chee had refused to take a place in the canoe, and openly disparaged their chance of success. So Ko Chee didn't count in this case.

Nearer and nearer came the canoe, till the movement of the bow-man's strong arms could be plainly seen. Then, all of a sudden, they doubled the rate of stroke in a final spurt, and "Chā, chā," the racing-shout, echoed like thunder along the banks. The canoe shot past the watchers; the bow-man flourished his paddle in the air, and the crew all "easied." Some fell back, and propped their panting bodies with an arm, while others scooped up the cool water, and splashed it over their brawny, glistening shoulders—seven strong young men. The eighth was an older man. He, perched on the stern, was the helmsman, and apparently also the coach of the crew; for he raised his voice and called to the bow-man, "Ho! Ba Saw, the paddles were too slow on the leap. When I shout 'Loo-la' (Are we men?), at that instant

you must answer 'Chā' (We are tigers), and let the paddles bite the water. And ho! you men, all must work together, for thus only will the 'Shway-Sāt-Daw' spring forward like a sambur."

The canoe swung slowly round, and headed for the bank. The bow-man laid his paddle across the boat, and twisted his coloured head-band round his long, black hair, his muscles playing in ripples along his arms and over his massive shoulders. He bunched his skirt about his loins, gripped the gunwales of the canoe, and trailed a tattooed leg in the water to feel for the bottom as the boat came in towards the shore.

Suddenly, with a thunder of hoofs, a pair of bullocks charged down the bank, their driver following hard in pursuit, with threatening shouts and a stick. The maddened beasts floundered into the water, straight towards the canoe, and for the moment it seemed as though the frail craft were doomed to destruction. But, from the water beneath the very feet of the plunging bullocks, arose a head with monstrous horns, and a huge black body surged upward with a roaring splash. The bullocks, thrown to right and left, turned, struggled back to the bank, scrambled up, and careered away, with tails uplifted in alarm.

The huge black water-buffalo, thus rudely disturbed from his evening bath in the muddy water (where he had been lying, covered up to the tip of his nose), stalked towards the bank, with dripping flanks and head raised high in majestic indignation.

The owner of the bullocks turned away, and ran after his beasts. Ko Chee it was, the "head bachelor" himself.

"Heh, Ko Chee!" Ba Saw shouted in good-humoured jest; "the head bachelor is not the chief of bullock-drivers, it seems."

"He drives carelessly," assented one member of the crew.

"He wished to injure the canoe, that it may not win the race," another suggested.

"Ko Chee has bet against us."

"Ah! 'Tis true," the fierce-visaged paddle-men growlingly concurred as they prepared to make a landing.

"But the Water-Nāt protects us," the helmsman said, with earnest solemnity.

"'Tis so. The Water-Nāt placed the buffalo there to keep the canoe from harm," the men murmured in low tones, as they stepped out into the water.

The helmsman remained seated. Turning his face towards the river, he put his palms together and bent forward thrice. Then, taking

the bunch of flowers that hung over the water from the stern of the canoe—the propitiatory offering to the Water-Nāt—he lowered it carefully over the side, and pushed it with his paddle out into the muddy stream. The crew stood and watched in silence.

The gaily-coloured token floated on the surface, circling slowly towards the swiftly-running tide. Then, caught by an eddy, it spun quickly round, and, of a sudden, disappeared, as if pulled beneath the water by an unseen hand.

"Look! look!" the voices whispered: "'His Lordship' takes the gift."



CHAPTER VI

THE SHWAY DAGŌN PAGODA

As regards the four kinds of slaves of the Kyoungs (and Pagodas), those who have been devoted by the king by the usual ceremony of dropping water, shall not be redeemed; let them be hereditary, and irredeemably attached to the Kyoung. . . . They were devoted with the intention of their remaining to the end of the five thousand years that the religion of the Booda Gaudama shall exist.

Laws of Manoo (*from the Burmese "Damathat"*).

Buddha said, "Do not ask about descent, but ask about conduct."

Sundarika-bhâradvâga-sutta.

It was the "eighth day of the waxing of Thadinchoot," and a day of worship at the Shway Dagōn Pagoda; the "full moon" in seven days' time would mark the end of the Buddhist Lent, and be a signal for great festivities.

At Rangoon, chief of all attractions at the full-moon festival are the races on the great Royal Lakes. The crews from the villages up the numerous creeks for miles around had already brought down their canoes for a final practice on the lakes. Races for "sixes" there

would be and races for "eights" (of the latter, the winning "eight" would carry off the trophy of championship); and at the end of all a crew of Englishmen, in a four-oared boat of Clasper's famous make, would sally forth to challenge the winners—a good subject for betting; and what Burman is there who would not go two-days' journey for such a sporting purpose?

To-day was the "eighth day of the waxing," and streams of worshippers were wending their way up the steep roads towards the great pagoda, whose majestic spire of shimmering gold towered upwards from among the palm-trees on the summit of the hill, and flashed back the glory of the rising sun in the crystal morning light.

The bare-footed devotees flitted noiselessly along the road in the chequered sunshine and shadow, under the green canopy of over-arching trees. Their white coats, their skirts of reds and greens, and silk head-bands of various hues flashed one after another into brightness as, here and there, they passed through the jets of golden sunlight, a quickly-changing kaleidoscope of happy colouring that breathed the joy of mere existence. One glance!—and gone were all the dark cares that poison life.

But see there! Who are those men and

women shuffling by the road-side, whose dingy garments reflect nothing of this brightness? Their heads are raised, but they look neither to right nor left. They are the blind!—a string of blind beggars, each with a hand upon the shoulder of the one in front—the blind leading the blind! Their leader has passed along the same dreary road ever since his first step taken in the world of darkness till—by long suffering and many stumblings—he has come to know each stone and tree-root in the path. See how he taps familiar objects! How large those obstacles must seem to his desponding mind! Poor things. A type of the dreary-souled whose minds (as Buddha showed) are filled with the darkness of Self (Māya), which makes every little trouble seem of crushing magnitude—the people who in outward acts and words reflect nothing of the happiness around them. From the darkness of self, Lord Buddha, deliver us!

At the top of the hill the crowd was streaming up the steep, stone stairway that mounted to the base of the great pagoda. As in the Upward Way that leads to Nirvana, so here, "the first noble truth is the existence of sorrow." On the burning flagstones, at the sun-scorched entrance of the stairway, were seated the beggar folk—wrinkled with age and

sun; maimed with leprosy; some whose eyeballs, white and shrivelled, almost seemed to rattle in their hollow sockets. "Thadoo, thadoo," they muttered, as the copper rattled in the battered tin alms-bowl.

Step by step, the pilgrim had to climb the steep ascent, till he reached at last the Nirvana of cool arcades and pillared halls on the level stretch of pavement round the base of the solid, towering pagoda. Hiding here and there among the pillars of the halls were stalls, where "pagoda-slaves" sold flowers, candles, and gold-leaf for decorating the shrines.

At one of these flower-stalls a slim maiden was seated, apparently engrossed in her toilet. She ground a piece of soft, white wood on a stone, gathered up the powder thus produced, and smeared it over her smooth cheeks with the palms of her two slender hands, by the help of a small, cracked mirror. She hardly needed the aid of powder, for her complexion was fairer than is usual in a Burmese girl, because all her life had been spent in these sheltering halls, the blackness of whose shadows seemed to lurk in her large dark eyes.

Apparently satisfied that the powder was evenly spread, she dabbed up some inky paste on a minutely small brush, and proceeded to accentuate her eyebrows with elaborate care,

consulting the glass several times to make sure that the two brows were evenly matched. This done to her satisfaction, she selected a red flower from her stall, thrust it in the coils of jet black hair at the side of her head, and gave it a pat with one hand. But her actions were purely mechanical, for she was listening intently to a discussion that was going on beside her.

An old lady (the mother no doubt) was doubled on a mat on the ground, with her nether limbs tucked under her, and her body propped up with an arm. She flourished a large white cheroot in the air, as if to wave aside the arguments of the other party in the discussion. He—squatting on his heels, like a frog—was a Burman of unusually strong build; the play of the muscles of his thick-set shoulders could be plainly seen through the thin sleeves of his linen coat, as he waved his hands in emphasis.

"Amay!" (My anxious parent) he ejaculated; "I say it is of no consequence. In my village" (lowering his voice) "none will ever know that she was a Payā-joon; she shall be the wife of Ba Saw! And none shall dare say that she was once a pagoda-slave. And 'Who is Ba Saw?' Ask any man from Tanbin (but do not tell him why you ask). Ask them what

sort of man is Ba Saw; what like are his fields, house, and bullocks."

The old woman pointed another objection with the end of her cheroot.

"Eh? You 'Cannot spare the girl'?"—he repeated her words—"and 'I give nothing in exchange'? I tell you I have no money now, but in a few days I shall have plenty; for, on the full-moon day, we paddle Shway-Sāt-Daw in the great race. All my money is laid upon the race—and we will win." He rose up and slapped his brawny arms and thighs.

But the woman was unmoved by the sight of mere muscle. "They all talk great words—those that make contest," she coldly remarked.

Aghast at this unbelief, Ba Saw stared at her; then, "Bah!" he ejaculated passionately: "You do not know the men from Tanbin! You have not seen the Shway-Sāt-Daw—how she springs like a sambur when the paddles dig wells in the water, and the race-shout roars like a storm in the trees!"

The girl flashed a quick glance at him from beneath her dark lashes; but her mother affected a scornful laugh. Ba Saw bumped down on his heels, and came to close quarters. "Say now, how much is the girl worth to you?" he whispered earnestly.

In explanation, her mother motioned to the

throng of worshippers. "All the high-folk buy their flowers from us, because Mā Pwā Cho is young and pretty."

"How many rupees?" Ba Saw persisted.

The woman blew at the end of her cheroot. A problem like this required time for consideration. "Two hundred," she suggested boldly, knowing full well that one hundred is a fair price for a girl.

"Huh!" Ba Saw sprang up. "I go. On the day after full-moon I return with the money."

"Two hundred and fifty," the woman called after him, as he disappeared down the steps.

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And as he departed, another man, who had been sitting behind an adjacent pillar during the whole conversation, now rose up and sauntered away. He was no other than Ko Chee, the "head bachelor" of Tanbin.

CHAPTER VII

A CANOE RACE

Pinyā, nyān, kān shee hlin, loo nain mā baw.
With science and skill, and luck thrown in, 'tis certain that a man must win.

Burmese Proverb.

Buddha said: "You, yourself, must make an effort."

Dharmapada.

If you be a Burman, patient reader, there will be no need for me to tell you the histories of those famous canoes that gathered at the Great Royal Lakes, for you know well the records of "Buddamyā" (the Ruby) and of "Mee-choung-min" (the King of Crocodiles)—that black and polished veteran of a hundred years and more—and who has not heard how that "Sāt" (the Sambur), by prowess shown before King Mindoon Min, earned the titles "Shway" and "Daw," and now is known as "Shway-Sāt-Daw" (the King's Gold Sambur).

And you (if you be a Burman) can tell me, perhaps, who it was that taught the canoe-carver how to shape those subtle curves that

give speed to a racing craft. Was it simple, innate art, disdaining the aid of cultured science, or was it "Yokaso" (the Tree-Nāt), who guided the adze as it chipped the clumsy tree-trunk to the graceful shape of those knife-edged bows, the sweeping sides, and gently-rising stern, till the rough log grew to a thing of beauty, such that even the Water-Nāt became enamoured? For when the smooth, graceful body of the Shway-Sāt-Daw glides over the surface scarce a ripple is roused, and the quick-tempered Nāt seems lulled to sleep.

On the day of the races, the green banks of the lakes seemed to have burst into flower, and were all ablaze with the bright colours of the throng of sight-seers. The races would not take place until the cool of the evening, but there was plenty of entertainment for those that grew tired of watching the preparation and trial-spins. In shady nooks, under roofs of bamboo matting, carpets were spread on the grass. Here the wives and daughters could be left, to sit down and chat, or have a nice quiet chew of betel-nut, while "Old Paddy-bird" and his neighbour from Pa-zoon-doung tucked up their silk pasos and thrust their way among the crowd round the betting-stalls. Most of the younger men disappeared into the jungle

of huts and tents by the roadside, where wrestling and boxing matches were in progress.

There were plenty of entertainments, too, where no "pice" were needed for admittance. In a shady grove of mango-trees a group of spectators squatted on their heels round a "chin-lon" expert, who, with his lonjee bunched up round his waist, made glass balls chase each other all over his tattooed body. To the sound of pipe and drum he threw the balls from foot to knee, and jerked them on to his shoulder, catching them under his ear. Then away they raced, over his back and down his arms, like squirrels on a tree—each evolution accompanied with a wallop on the drum and a shout from the delighted audience.

On the foreshore, like ornamental beds of flowers, groups of chattering Burmese ladies were planted in bunches on mats and rugs, and a full-dress band filled up the pauses in the conversation with a gentle patter of drums and bells, bursting out, now and then, in a volley of crashes and thumps to call the attention of the spectators to anything new that was going forward. The centre-piece of the orchestra was a circle of gilded palings, with a series of tuned drums of graduated sizes hanging inside. A skilful operator squatted in the midst, and sprang up and down, like a jack-in-the-box,

as his arms came down to right and left, and his lightning hands ran over suggestive upper notes or thumped with determined zeal on the bass. Standing apart was one big drum, like a huge beer-barrel, slung horizontally from a gilded pole in the shape of a dragon-snake. The duty of operating on this instrument was delegated to a boy, half the length of the drum, who had wisely stripped himself for the task. Acting in concert with his companion of the cymbals, with butts and thumps he roused the echoes when things wanted waking up.

The only silent creatures were the canoes tethered by the shore, though even they seemed to be alive. Their long black bodies rolled gently from side to side, as they tugged at the nose-ropes and grubbed in the mud of the bank, like buffaloes unyoked and resting for a spell. They seemed to be conversing in undertones, perhaps of some historic struggle long ago.

Out in the middle of the water stood the winning-post, a letter A of bamboos, two long posts stuck down into the bottom, and a short cross-piece at right angles to the course. This bamboo cross-piece was pierced through the joints, and hollowed into a pipe; inside it rested a piece of cane, with ends projecting a few inches on either side. According to

ancient custom, canoes race two abreast, passing one on each side of the winning-post; and in the last final spurt the bow-man in each boat scrambles out on the bows, and stretches forward to grab the piece of cane. It is good to have something tangible as a sign of victory—something that you can wave in the air—because then everybody can see which boat has won, and there is less chance of a "dead-heat," for it is only when the cane is gripped at both ends at once, and neither man slips off, that there can be a "thayay-pway" (a "devil-dance").

The crews were grouped together on the bank, near by their canoes. There were men from Chouktan and Bassein, and the eight Winbadaw men who were to paddle the Mee-choung-min against the Shway-Sāt-Daw of Tanbin. This latter was the final of the championship races, and the great event of the day, as one could tell by the shouts from the betting booths.

The Tanbin men were gathered in a group, sitting on their heels in a restful attitude, with knees up under armpits and arms folded round them, smoking—the Burman does not deny himself tobacco when in training. Most of them had already prepared for the fray. Stripped to the waist—with their lonjees

bunched up round their loins—they displayed the symmetry of their brawny muscles—strong men, with the simple minds of children.

One of them rose up and twisted his lonjee tighter. (That garment is so apt to burst loose when the wearer is squatting on his heels.) He let the folds fall to the knee, gathered them up again at the sides, pulled the slack tight between his legs from behind, and tucked it in at the waist. He had scarcely attained to manhood, evidently, for the pattern of the blue tattoo marks, that covered his legs from knees to waist, showed up distinctly.

"Moung Shin is uneasy," said Tuesday-born, who had been watching the performance closely.

Moung Shin ("Mr. Squirrel") could not trust himself to reply, but sat down again, with a finely-assumed air of nonchalance to hide his nervousness. He borrowed a cheroot from Ba Saw's mouth, took two sucks, gave it back, stroked himself, and proceeded to crack each of his finger-joints, to see if they were all right.

Tuesday-born tilted forward on his toes, to point to Squirrel's thigh with the end of his cheroot. "Uncle Stab made that tiger's head well," he said. (Uncle Stab was the tattoo-professor of Tanbin.)

"Uncle Stab said that if we all had tigers' heads we should be sure to win," Redman remarked.

A general search for tigers' heads ensued. Ba Saw located an ambiguous design on a recondite portion of his muscular thigh which was unanimously voted to be a tiger's head. He folded his arms round his knees again, with evident satisfaction. "Where's yours, Redman?" he asked sternly.

Redman had hunted in vain among the blue designs on his thigh. As the initial of his name (Loo-nee) indicated, he was a Wednesday man, and, consequently, embroidered with elephants, not tigers. "There would not have been space to put a tiger among so many elephants," he offered by way of excuse.

"If a man's legs are thin, there will not be space," Ba Saw remarked unfeelingly.

Redman withdrew the offending limb under his body, and regarded Ba Saw's ample proportions. He boiled with the effort of finding a rejoinder, and would have burst, had not Hard-as-Iron just then joined the group.

"That money-lender is a stingy dog," Hard-as-Iron growled, as he unrolled his head-band and drew his fingers through his long black hair. "The man said he would

give me fifty rupees if we win, but I must promise two hundred if we lose. It is like driving a buffalo in yoke with a cow-calf."

"You should have given the money to Oo Ba, the helmsman; he knows how to bet."

"Tell us how it was done, Oo Ba," said Squirrel.

The veteran Oo Ba was lost in thought.

"Tell," said several.

Oo Ba withdrew his gaze and his thoughts from infinity, spat out a thin squirt of betel-juice, and enumerated with slow deliberation—and for at least the twentieth time—the bets that he had made with the money that had been entrusted to him for that purpose, and which represented practically the entire pecuniary fortunes of the crew.

"Hoo," Ba Saw barked, gripping the muscles of his arm. "How much shall we win, Oo Ba?"

"More than we can carry back."

"I shall build a bridge," said Squirrel. "Or a monastery," suggested another. "Will it be enough to build a monastery?" "I shall buy a new head-band," said Hard-as-Iron, as he looked at the frayed end of the piece of silk that he was winding round his hair." "And I——"

"Boom!" the big drum suddenly sounded, as "Mee-choung-min" (the King of Crocodiles) glided out with his crew.

"Heh! they go!" Oo Ba ejaculated, springing to keen activity.

The Tanbin men all started to their feet, to watch the rival crew paddle past. The King of Crocodiles was a formidable opponent; but his crew were hardly up to the mark this year, and besides, they had lost the toss, and would have to race on the "town side" of the course, where the water was shallow, and the Water-Nāt, consequently, short-tempered. (For in shallow places the Water-Nāt holds on to the bottom of the canoe, and has to be dragged along behind in an angry following wash.) See now, what the helmsman of the "Mee-choung-min" is doing—he has taken a bunch of fruit from the bottom of the boat, and is holding it over the water.

"Haw! They shekō to the Water-Nāt," Ba Saw sneered; "but he will not give them victory against us."

"La! Get ready!" Oo Ba exclaimed.

The Tanbin men rubbed at their arms, as they waded to the "Shway-Sāt-Daw," splashing the water over their brawny chests and shoulders, till the lumps of swelling muscles glistened in the sunlight, like the brown,

polished carving on the stern of the canoe. They took their places carefully in the narrow craft—one behind another—and baled out the last drop of water, while Oo Ba perched himself on the stern, holding the long steering-paddle.

They pushed out, and paddled up the course past the spectators. Taking the stroke from the bow-man, their paddles flashed and dipped in perfect time, and as the strong bodies bent forward to dig the water, the breath was expelled in a united grunt that could be heard half a mile away.

At a shout from Oo Ba, they burst into the boat-song, punctuating the words with vigorous digs of the paddles—

Thít thā, nāt thā, Tán-bin ywā gā Shway-
Sāt-Dáw thee.
A-á—myā thaw, Youk-jā Bā-thā, tét let tó ee.
Flesh of wood, but child of fairy,
Tanbin's pride is "Shway-Sāt-Daw."
Strength have we who ply her paddles;
Men! and sons of men! we are.

They ceased from paddling, and clapped their hollowed hands on their arms—a gesture of challenge and defiance. "Youk-jā! Bā-thā!"

"Aaee—," a long-drawn shout of appreciation rose from the seething mob.

Then again the paddles dipped; and the song broke out with fresh vigour, as the stroke grew faster:

"Loo-la, Chā-la?" (Are we men, or are we tigers?)

Suddenly Oo Ba shouted "Loo-la?" (Are we men?) in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Chā!" (Tigers!) the answer burst from the crew, with a crackling roar, like the breaking of a tree-branch, and at the same instant they sprang into a racing stroke of incredible swiftness—

Chā, chā, chā, —

the paddles flashing twice to each quick breath of tense exertion. The canoe shot away in the direction of the starting-post at the other end of the lake.

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The crowd round the betting-stalls had broken up, and trickled down to the water's edge; all eyes were turned in the direction of the starting-post, where the two canoes could be seen, like dots upon the water.

The flash of a gun, far away.

"Boom," the big drum sounded to tell the crowd that the race had started. "Pim-per-umper-um," the orchestra began playing gentle music, with "tipperings" on top notes, in

sympathy with the flutter of anxieties and hopes, and good sound "womps" on the low notes, to represent the certainty of right decisions.

Nearer and nearer came the canoes—how slowly they seemed to travel! The music of the orchestra grew in vivacity as the excitement rose, and the murmur of the crowd increased in volume, like the sound in trees before an oncoming storm. Then the big drum woke, the cymbals joined in with deafening clash, and every performer was crashing and thumping his hardest to be heard above the din of the shouting mob.

"Sāt! Sāt—Mee-choung!" (Sambur has it!—No!—Crocodile leads!)

The Crocodile was leading. Their bow-man turned his head to glance at the other canoe. The Sambur spurted. This was what the bow-man of the Crocodile was looking for. He let the Sambur come up level, then he spurted, and the Crocodile drew ahead. But he had misjudged the Sambur; for see! they are up level again. Now one boat, now the other, seems to be ahead.

"Chā, chā, chā." The roar of the Tanbin men rolled across the water, and for the moment they seemed to be springing ahead. But the Crocodile hung on, and would not be shaken off.

By a yard or two the Sambur had the lead, as the boats raced up to the bamboo-cross, with its projecting ends of cane. The bow-man in each canoe scrambled forward. Each stretched out a hand—ah! has he got it? Ba Saw pulled out the cane! and snatched the victory for the Sambur.

"Aah!" The pent-up breath of the crowd burst forth in a roar: "Sāt has won!" "Crocodile has lost!" And the orchestra—with frantic energy—translated the discordant feelings of the confused uproar.

The Tanbin men had won!—they were the champion crew. They slapped their arms, and waved their paddles in the air, as the canoe came in to the shore. They leapt overboard, and waded to land, shouting triumph. Enthusiastic supporters tucked up their lonjees and danced ahead of them, gesticulating with the quaint postures of pway-dancers, to the accompaniment of the plopping of hands and cries of the mob.

"But the bets!—the winnings! Oo Ba, lead us to it—show where the money is to be gathered up." In a solid phalanx they charged through the crowd towards the betting booths.

Every coin was paid up—not a single "bookie" defaulted. Money!—money poured upon the victorious Tanbin men. They held it in bagfuls

in the folds of their lonjees; they plunged their arms into it; they grasped fistfuls of notes, waved them in the air, and thrust them into each other's hands, so that each might hold the whole lot, and see what it felt like. They passed it from one to another, till the novelty of the situation began to wear away.

By-and-by they grew tired of it. What was to be done with it all? how carry it about with them? They had already begun to feel the burden of riches! Each poured his share into the other man's hand: each demurred at the responsibility: till at last Oo Ba found himself staggering under the whole weight. "Do something with it, Oo Ba; we don't want it."

At this juncture a voice from the betting booth rose above the hubbub: "Two to one against the Sāt when they race the Thakins." Ah! the Thakins—the race against the Englishmen was to come.

"Oo Ba, bet it all again. Hark to what he says—we shall get twice as much after the race against the Thakins. Give it all back to the man—bet on the race against the four Thakins."

CHAPTER VIII

EAST *v.* WEST

Buddha said to Anāthapindika: . . . "A life of indolence is an abomination, and a lack of energy is to be despised."

PAUL CARUS.

Two minor races and a duck-hunt in tubs kept the crowd amused, while the Tanbin men were resting. Meanwhile, in a quiet corner of the lake—by the boat-house—the English "four" were getting into their boat.

"Bow" was an Eton man; "Two" was Jackson, whom we know already; "Three" was a red-haired, six-foot Scotsman; and "Stroke," a brown-legged veteran, who wore a cherished remnant of Leander scarf, which called to mind "aquatic feats on the Cam in dim, receding history." "Cox," standing on the landing-stage, quietly knotting his rudder-lines, could have well filled a place in the boat if it were not for his advanced years.

"We've got a hard nut to crack," remarked "Three," as he screwed up his stretcher. "I never saw such a ferocious gang of savages

in all my life—eight hairy, wiry men of the woods."

"Do you know what they were paddling at?" burst out "Two." "A hundred and twenty strokes a minute—I timed them. And we have to be satisfied with a modest forty, eh, 'Stroke'?"

"You leave that to me," growled "Stroke" —that fellow "Two" was always interfering with other people's business. "They can't keep up one hundred and twenty all over the course; and as soon as they drop to a slow stroke, I shall smarten up—so keep your eyes in the boat. Now, are you all ready? Haven't you got that blessed stretcher fixed yet, 'Three'? What is it now? A bit of grease for your button. Are you right? Where's that rasp? Ah, thanks. Shove her out."

"Forward; are you ready; paddle." The familiar words rang out amid strange surroundings, and the old "Clinker-four" set out across the lake, leaving bunches of puddles, like foot-prints, behind.

The Tanbin men were already at the starting-post, waiting—silent and determined—as the "four" came up, easied, and turned to head-up the course.

"Just look at their eyes!" "Two" said to "Three." "They must be as fit as knives, to get that look in ——"

"Silence in the boat. Listen to Cox," "Stroke" growled.

"Touch her, 'Two,'" Cox was saying. "That's enough. Half-forward, all."

[How strangely silent this end of the lakes seemed, compared with the hubbub at the winning-post!]

"Are you all ready?" came the still, small voice of the starter on the bank. [What a hurry he seemed to be in!] His words were repeated in Burmese by an attendant at his side. "Come up a little the 'four'; easy the canoe!" [Hope he won't give the start now—one's chest seems all tight and arms all flabby.] "Easy the canoe!"—the starter's voice again.

The Tanbin men, with eyes fixed ahead and paddles in the water, were edging their canoe forward by an invisible motion of the wrists.

"Touch her, 'Bow' and 'Two'"—the voice of Cox.

"Come back, both boats!"—the voice from the bank.

"What's that they say?" Oo Ba was complaining that the Cox of the "four" was a long way in front of him, and it was not fair. "Tell him his bows are level—we go by that. He is behind because his boat is much longer. Now hold her, both boats . . . Are

you ready?" [What a long pause!] "Are you ready?" Gun!

The waters roared, as if swept by a sudden storm. Three hard strokes pulled through anyhow, and the "four" swung out, driving the strokes from the stretcher as the strength, which had oozed from the limbs at the start, rapidly returned. But the canoe—where was it?

The canoe had shot ahead, for the "Chā, chā" of their racing stroke was more than a match for the "four." "Two" took his eyes from "Stroke's" back and flicked a quick glance at the canoe—their stern was bobbing alongside level with him.

"Eyes in the boat, 'Two'—you're late." [There's that Cox yelling.] "Watch the time—feel the stretchers—hands away." [Can't think of everything, at this rate of stroke. Wish he were in this place himself.]

The canoe still forged ahead—out past the island—into the open bay, showing as yet no signs of flagging. Would they keep up that lightning-stroke the whole way over the course? "Two" was conscious of a boiling sea of paddle-puddles roaring past.

At last, the shout from the canoe changed to a longer sound—"Lay-sway, lay-sway." "Stroke" of the "four" heard it, and grunted to Cox.

"Now, pick it up," roared Cox. "Ten hard strokes."

[One, two, three—how tough the water felt!] Things were beginning to go black, when "Two" became conscious of the Tanbin helmsman and the stern of the canoe bobbing alongside; then one, then two grunting bodies, and the thrash of churning paddles. The sound seemed to stiffen the backs of the "four," and put life into their strokes. Leap by leap they overhauled the canoe. Now they were level.

Oo Ba and the Cox yelled simultaneously. Both boats spurted, piling on the strokes to the bursting-point; but the canoe was the faster, and forged ahead.

[Ah! was it over?—had they gone for good? —something seemed splitting!] And thereafter "Two's" impression of the race was a blank, save for the consciousness of "Stroke's" back swinging faster and faster, and a confused murmur from the banks.

But the "four" had come up; and now they were level again. Eighty yards more to the finish! The murmur of the crowd grew to a roar, for the "four" were creeping ahead. Inch by inch, foot by foot, they drew out, till the "canvas" of their bows was jerking ahead of the canoe.

The canoe slowly fell back. Were they

done? Their time was perfect, but the rate of stroke had dropped and their song-shout had degenerated into a grunt. Now their bows were level with "Two" in the "four!"

Forty yards more! had they got a spurt left in them?

Oo Ba let out a yell—"Tigers! Sons of tigers!"

See, the Tanbin men! They answer to the shout, "Ug-ug-ug." Up they come. Look at their bow-man; he is foaming at the mouth, and his eyes are starting. But see the fierce energy of his paddle; faster and faster he works the stroke up. Up they come, hand over hand. They win! they win!—

But no! the "four" shot past the post a foot ahead of the canoe.

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"Well rowed, you men," coughed "Stroke," hanging on to the irons of his stretcher.

"Look at—them," groaned "Two," in a heap over his oar; "they're as done as we are."

The Tanbin men were utterly played out. They were lying in heaps against each other and at the bottom of the canoe, and a stray paddle floated away astern.

"Ah—they're sportsmen! Give 'em a cheer, boys. Rattle your oars."

CHAPTER IX

PWĀ CHO, THE PAGODA-SLAVE

"O Lord, help me, for I love Ananda."

And the Blessed One (Buddha) understood the emotions of her heart, and he said, "Prakriti, your heart is full of love, but you do not understand your own sentiments. It is not Ananda whom you love, but his kindness. Receive, then, the kindness, and in the humility of your station, practise it unto others . . . Prakriti, you are of low caste, but Brahmans will learn a lesson from you. Swerve not from the path of justice, and you will outshine the royal glory of queens on the throne."

PAUL CARUS, *The Woman at the Well.*

MĀ PWĀ CHO (Miss Born-Sweet) sat in her usual place. It was the "second day of the waning," and the pagoda was deserted. All last night, until third cock-crow this morning, the courts had been a scene of revelry; but to-day the people had gone home to bed.

Pwā Cho was tired and sad. She had not slept a wink all night, but with bright, anxious eyes, had scanned the throng that passed and re-passed her stall. She had heard that the Tanbin crew were defeated and had lost all their money, for everybody was talking about

the race; but hope still seemed to fill her with watchfulness. And now, this morning had brought back all the old life, with its monotonous daily routine. The courts around here were littered with rubbish—the reminders of a joy that was passed; and her flowers were all faded —like her life and her hope.

"People are scarce," her mother said, curtly. Her lips were oozing with red betel-juice, and a patch of powder accentuated the prominent cheek-bone on one side of her face. She was not in the habit of powdering, for she had long ago retired from that part of the business; but last night was exceptional. Powder rubs off when one sits up all night; and when one is out of the habit, one forgets to wash the face clean in the morning. Besides, the old woman was too tired to trouble about her appearance, and she was distinctly out of humour. No doubt she was cross with Ba Saw for not coming last night to fulfil his engagement, and annoyed with herself for letting a good bargain slip through her fingers; and, naturally, her "mind was short" with Pwā Cho, the cause of all the bother. "People are scarce," she repeated, irritably. "Don't you hear me?"

Pwā Cho sighed, and languidly re-arranged her faded flowers. A sweet-meat seller, with two baskets hanging from a creaking yoke,

trotted past on his way down the stairs. "People are scarce," he agreed, with a nod; "there's no business to-day."

The sun had risen high, and the few worshippers who had remained were now departing, for the scorching heat on the flag-stones of the pavement round the pagoda had become too much for even the most devout of kneelers. In the hot, still air, sounds seemed separate and lonesome. A mangy yellow-dog growled discontentedly as he grubbed among the remains of food-offerings, and the moan of a great bell roamed through the empty hall. It was the voice of the "Maha Ganda" that filled the air with sound, as some belated devotee roused the meditating mass of metal to tell the world of one more duty done—striking on it with a sambur-horn, till the voices disturbed within the bell joined in a tumult of protest, and then sank away again to incoherent mutterings in its interior.

From the cool shadows of a prayer-house opposite came the steady chanting of the priests —a deep-toned, solemn drone: "Awgāthā—Kayāgān, wāzegān, manawgān" (From the evils of the body, the tongue, and the mind, let us keep ourselves free; for Awga, the stream of passion, carries all creatures away). Pwā Cho sat gazing at the archway of the prayer-house

where the carved wooden tracery had caught the sunlight and stood forth in bold outline against the blackness of the interior. The carving represented a man in a tiger's mask in the act of carrying off a fainting damsel from her seat at the loom; and the tale illustrated was that of Mā Shway Oo, the fair maid of Kyaukse, who loved, and was loved by, Ko Shway Moung. Her lover, too, went forth into the world to win a fortune for them both, and many years she waited; but, on the eve of his return, a mountain-nāt came in the form of a tiger and carried her away. . . .

Pwā Cho sighed. Her mother yawned, and spat out the remnant of a betel-nut; then, sticking her cheroot in her hair, she stood up to re-arrange her skirt; she loosened the waist-part, stretched the slack away from her body, folded it over tightly, and tucked it in at the waist.

"I go home," she remarked. "Come."

CHAPTER X

AFTER THE RACE

Self is an error, an illusion, a dream.
Open your eyes and awake. See things as they are, and you will be comforted.

PAUL CARUS, *The Sermon at Rājagriha.*

ON the day after the race, the Tanbin men were gathered together in the hut that served them as temporary quarters in Kan-daw-galay, beyond the lakes. Several times Oo Ba had said, "Let us go home"; and others had repeated "Let us go"; but they sat where they were, expectorating mournfully, for the journey back meant a day of long paddling.

Ba Saw sat on his heels, chewing bitter thoughts and the end of a cheroot. Yesterday, amid the fierce joy of bodily exertion, he had had no time to think of anything except the race—the matter in hand. Love is strong, indeed, to rouse men to action; but who can stop to think of such a paltry weakness when great deeds are a-doing? But now, Ba Saw sat on his heels, enveloped in a cloud of dejection



and smoke, while—from the look in his eyes—a crowd of "might-have-beens" were staggering past wringing their hands with regret. There was that girl at the pagoda; and her mother who held out for two hundred rupees. Two hundred! She could have had two thousand yesterday, if she had been on the spot. But now, after that last race, where was the money?

Redman had been fixedly regarding Ba Saw for some time. Once or twice he had seemed to be on the point of speaking to him, but the gruesome aspect of Ba Saw's countenance set him back on his heels. At last, however, he could contain himself no longer; he waddled forward, jerked out his hand, and said, in an aggrieved tone of voice, "It is my turn to have the tobacco-roll." Cheroots are scarce when there is no money, and this "tobacco-roll" had to be passed round after twelve sucks.

Ba Saw handed it over without a word; but Redman looked ruefully at the much-chewed end, and said, "Ba Saw takes two man's share; he puts fire to one end and eats the other."

This was a matter of public importance. Hard-as-iron took possession of the cheroot, and examined it. He looked towards Ba Saw for an explanation, but a glance at the ferocious countenance struck him dumb. Staring at

Ba Saw with slow amazement, he put the cheroot into his mouth, regardless of Redman's gesture of indignation.

"It would be good if we had a second cheroot," Squirrel remarked, after thinking the matter over.

No answer seemed called for, and they sat in silence for a spell, brooding mournfully. There was not even betel-nut to chew, but one by one they canted forward on their toes and spat through the cracks in the floor from force of habit.

It was Oo Ba who began doing something. He undid a knot in the corner of his lonjee, and said, "Here are two rupees."

They stopped spitting to look at the money. One of them slowly put forth a hand, took the coins, and turned them over gently in his palm. "What is two rupees?"

Hard-as-iron took possession of the money, got up, stepped out of the house, and walked away down the road. The others stared after him; then, one by one, they silently rose up and followed.

CHAPTER XI

A DACOIT

Accompanied only by strong resolution, the great Sakya Saint went and sat at the root of an Asvattha tree.

And Māra, the enemy—he whom they call in the world Kamadéva, the owner of various weapons, the flower-arrowed Lord of the Course of Desire, the disturber of minds, and of freedom the enemy—seizing his bow made of flowers and heart-piercing arrows, drew near to the root of that Asvattha tree. . . .

But even the arrow by which the god Sambhu was smitten with love could not turn the great saint from his noble resolve.

From the "Buddha-karita" of Asvaghosha.

AT nightfall Ba Saw returned to the hut, and found that rice was cooked. Ko Chee (the head bachelor) was there, too, and seemed to be in high spirits, relating some jest to the others; but when Ba Saw entered, all stared at him in silence. He took no notice of them, but helped himself to a double handful of rice from the tray on the floor, piled it on a strip of plantain leaf as a plate, and sat to eat. His eyes stared across the room towards a corner in which stood a dā—a heavy, sword-like chopper, with a stout bamboo handle. Even when he lowered his

head to take the rice from his fingers his eyes and his thoughts seemed fixed on that dā.

As soon as his meal was finished, Ba Saw arose like one who has made up his mind, and strode across the room. The edge of the dā was sharp, and the firm feeling of the handle seemed to strengthen his determination. He stepped out of the hut down to the ground, and whacked the dā into a stump, while he tucked up his lonjee, as one does when there is need for action.

"Ba Saw is going to hunt the deer!" Ko Chee shouted, jestingly.

"Take the oil-wick on your head—'tis a good way to catch deer at night," Redman suggested.

"Heh! Ba Saw," Ko Chee called after him, "methinks it will be a doe." But Ba Saw had disappeared into the night.

The moon was not yet high; shadows were long and black. Ba Saw seemed to prefer shadows to-night, for he avoided the patches of moonlight, and hurried along the sidepath of the road that winds round the lakes towards the pagoda. Silence also seemed part of his scheme, for his shoes were tucked in his clothes at the waist. However, he met with nobody till he came to the first cross-road. Here a tall, turbaned figure was standing full in the moon-

light. It is best to avoid the police when one is carrying a dā at night-time, and Ba Saw jumped behind the bushes at the side of the road. Creeping through the jungle like a panther, he circumvented the danger zone and came out again into the road further on.

At the foot of the pagoda hill, he had turned down the road that leads past the village of Bahān. The gloomy jungle on the banks of the lakes followed the road on the right-hand side, and on the left the dark shapes of huts standing on posts loomed in black outline among the tree-trunks. Between the road and the huts ran a ditch, spanned at one place by a narrow plank bridge. Ba Saw was about to cross over, but a light streamed out of one of the huts and fell across the pathway. He stood still for a moment, then passed further down the road, and was swallowed in the shadows.

A dead twig snapped in the ditch, and the black outline of Ba Saw's stealthily moving figure showed up against the light from a hut; he had crossed the ditch, and was groping his way between the huts. His dā was stuck between the tight fold of his lonjee and the flesh of his back behind, and he was using both hands to feel his way among the rubbish heaps, creeping between the posts that sup-

ported the huts and skirting round patches of moonlight. Once he stumbled over a low bamboo fence, and a dog started up, barking furiously, but (at the familiar scent of Burman) retreated again, growling apologies.

At last Ba Saw reached a hut that stood a little apart from the rest. The light from the open front streamed forth and threw long shadows over the ground, but behind the hut, where Ba Saw was, everything was in darkness. He crept silently forward until he had come close up to the corner post of the front of the hut, and stood with his chest on a level with the bamboo platform outside. This corner of the platform was in darkness. He began to raise his body slowly on to it, but the flimsy structure creaked beneath his weight. He stopped still, and then felt for his dā. But there was no movement within the hut; he had not been detected as yet. He changed his plans, however, and lowered himself carefully back to the ground, and then put his eye to a hole in the matting of the wall and spied out the interior.

The light came from a smoky lamp guttering on the floor beside an empty rice-tray. The occupants of the room were three: a man and a woman at the further side (chewing betel-nut, gazing at nothing), and a girl seated near



the watcher with her back towards him. Her form was outlined against the light, and a large dog stood behind her with its chin over her shoulder; its tail waved with contentment as the girl pressed its head against her cheek.

"Why do you sit like that?" the woman exclaimed, sharply. "Go, clean the rice-pot."

Ba Saw sank below the level of the platform as a shadow fell on the bushes outside, and the girl stepped out to the edge of the platform to empty a pot of water on the ground and throw down a handful of soiled plantain-leaves. The dog, too, came out with her and jumped down to see if anything eatable had been overlooked. The girl stood for a moment looking out into the darkness, and then turned and went back into the hut. It was Pwā Cho. Ba Saw profited by the noise of the bamboos creaking under her feet to swing himself up into the dark corner of the platform; but the dog saw the movement and fled away, barking in a fearsome manner.

"What happens?" the woman asked. "What is Kway barking at?"

Pwā Cho came out again, and peered into the darkness. Ba Saw sprang forward, and reached out to catch her, but she jumped back with a scream, and scrambled into the hut.

In a bound Ba Saw had followed her, and stepped into the hut, brandishing his dā.

With a yell, the old woman scrambled to her feet and rushed to the box where her valuables were kept, screaming, "Ho—neighbours!—a dacoit—I am robbed!"

Pwā Cho had collapsed on the floor, staring at Ba Saw with eyes wide open, as if fascinated by the sight of his demeanour and his dā. "He has come to kill me—he has come to kill me," she kept repeating, in a cold, fate-stricken manner; for she knew the ways of a Burman lover when he cannot get what he wants and is determined that nobody else shall have it.

Ba Saw stamped across the room to the man in the corner, shook his dā in his face, and rendered him powerless with terror; then, still keeping his eye upon the man, he stepped backwards towards Pwā Cho. Suddenly he whirled the dā round his head and smashed it down on the wick of the lamp, plunging everything in darkness. There was a sound of scuffling—a short cry—then two dark forms dashed out of the hut, one dragging the other by the arm.

Ba Saw hurried the girl down the pathway in the darkness, over the ditch, and into the road. Pwā Cho seemed stupefied, and



stumbled along till her skirt tripped her up and brought both to a halt.

She clung to the arm that held her: "Kill me now—strike quickly and finish," she pleaded.

Ba Saw freed his dā-arm and turned to look back. The scream of the old woman in the hut was now joined by other voices, and men ran from every hut. There were one—two—three dark figures that jumped into the moonlight on the road, and another stood and shouted. In the other direction the road was open. Ba Saw stooped down, gathered up the fainting girl in a bundle of limbs and clothes, and bounded off down the road.

He ran straight ahead for a hundred yards, then suddenly turned aside, and dived into the dark jungle on the banks of the lake. In a thicket of bushes he stopped, and crouched down. But the foremost of the pursuers had seen him turn aside; he pointed the place out to the others:

"He is in there."

"Go; drive him out," they eagerly suggested. "We must stay here, and see where he runs to."

But the foremost man resigned the position. "The thief has a dā," he explained.

This was news to some of the others, and

evidently put the matter on a different footing. One of them dropped down on his heels and began to re-arrange his headband. "What has the man stolen?" he asked.

Another squatted down beside him. "He has stolen Pwā Cho."

"It is early in the season," the first man remarked.

"That's true: the season for running off with girls lacks a month yet."

"Then he should be made to give her up," a third man suggested.

"He should."

"How?"

They sat for some time, thinking the problem over. Then one man began slowly to relate how that, at Myo-bin-jee, they had set fire to the jungle to get a man out—but that was in the daytime. Another remembered that, at Ta-wa, in a similar instance they had all taken lamps and surrounded the jungle—but in that case the man was unarmed.

Presently one of them stood up, saying that he was getting chilled, and walked off homewards. The others rose up and followed, still discussing the matter. A stone went crashing through the bushes, and the last pair of footsteps pattered away down the road.

Ba Saw came out from under the thicket



where he was hiding. With his human burden on his arm, he picked his way among the bushes, silently and stealthily, in a direction parallel to the road. At a safe distance from the scene of his exploit he returned to the road. Bursting through the hedge, he stepped over the ditch and stood out full in the moonlight.

"Where are you going to?" a small, weak voice whispered, close to his ear.

Ba Saw stopped still. The helplessness of that voice seemed to have twitched at something inside him. He looked down at the girl on his arm for some moments, and then said, "Back to your mother's, of course." He took two steps, and made a show of going back along the road.

"No, no, no!" Pwā Cho clung round his neck, hysterically. "Don't take me back." Her voice rose in quavering tones of distress. "Oh! Ba Saw, if you cannot take me away with you, then kill me now. Do not let them take me back!"

"Hush, hush," Ba Saw said, gently. "They will hear you, and come after us again. Hark!" he said, pretending to listen, "I hear them coming. Hold on to my neck. Now, quick!" He raced away in the other direction, careering down the road in the moonlight,

capering into the air with bounds and leaps that sent his long shadow into fits of distortion.

"Look at it! look at it!" Pwā Cho exclaimed, half frightened, half laughing; "it runs at us like a big black dog."

"Are you afraid of it?" Ba Saw stopped for breath.

"I am not afraid—with you. But I shall fall;" and, to prevent that catastrophe, she wriggled down to the ground. Thence, in a more seemly manner, they proceeded quietly, side by side.

"Where are we going?" it was Ba Saw's turn to ask the question now. He stopped and looked about him, and at the stars. "Methinks this road leads to Pazoondoung," he said. "It is good. I know of a man whose boat goes up the river on the morning tide, and he will take us to Tanbin. Or shall we go on board the steamer, like rich folk? I have money now, for to-day I went and borrowed."

But Pwā Cho did not care how or where they went. It was enough that Ba Saw was by her side while the Karma of past existences guided her feet into the jungle of the unexplored future. Heedlessly she followed her fate to Tanbin.



CHAPTER XII

DRIVEN OUT

Buddha replied to the Brâhmana: "Who is an outcast? An outcast is he who is angry and bears hatred, and who harms living beings. . . . Whosoever is a provoker and is avaricious, has sinful desires, is envious, wicked, shameless and fearless of sinning, let one know him as an outcast. . . .

Not by birth does one become an outcast; by deeds one becomes an outcast.

MAX MÜLLER, *Sutta-nipata.*

Now Ko Chee, by virtue of his office of "loo-byo-goung" (head bachelor), was a man of no little importance in Tanbin. He was the president of the mutual assurance, and sat upon the chest of rupees, to which all the young men were compelled to subscribe. If, perchance, through some misfortune, a man were to fall into the clutches of the police, it was the "head bachelor" to whom he looked for a refund of the money extorted; and when, at any time, a Tanbin man became entangled in a quarrel with one from a neighbouring village, it was in the "head bachelor's" hut that the case came on for first hearing, and if the decision was

that the matter should be carried to the law-courts, then the rupee-chest was again opened to provide the maintenance money. But the chief function of the "head bachelor" was that of settling all questions of young men's etiquette; and if any youth from a neighbouring village should dare to come a-courting Tanbin maidens without permission, Ko Chee would direct the most pugnacious of his followers to break the head of the ardent swain.

Ba Saw, though admittedly the strongest man in the village, was disqualified for the position of "head bachelor" by reason of his peace-loving nature. Nevertheless, Ba Saw's opinion carried great weight among the village youths, and that weight was usually in the opposite scale to Ko Chee's. So Ko Chee hated Ba Saw, in a manner rare among Burmans—who can seldom hate anyone for more than five minutes.

And now Ko Chee had his rival in his power, for he was in full possession of the facts concerning Pwā Cho. On his return to Tanbin, two days after the arrival of the runaway couple, Ko Chee at once launched the fateful bolt.

He called a council, and laid before the village the fact that this "wife" Ba Saw had brought back was no other than a pagoda-



slave—a hereditary outcast. Some laughed, but others were serious; for it was not as if Ba Saw had bought a slave in ordinary course (though such a thing was forbidden by the present rulers of the country), but he openly avowed that this female animal was his wife! It was unprecedented—an offence to village society!

This feeling of annoyance would, no doubt, have passed away in time, for the Burman is generous and tolerant by nature. But there are exceptions to every class of men, and among these Ko Chee collected a following. Ba Saw, too, might have formed a retinue, but he preferred to treat the matter with disdain, and stood alone. In open contempt for Ko Chee's threats, he came and went about the village as usual.

But Pwā Cho's life was a misery, for the women of the village hugged and cherished an implacable resentment. One and all, they refused to have any dealings with her; they would not talk to her, nor sit near her, nor sell her rice. It was this latter trouble that brought matters to a climax, and roused Ba Saw to action.

Disputes grew frequent, and led to violence. Scarce a day passed without a scuffle, until at last the headman of the village felt called upon

to interfere. The legal headman, or "thoo-jee," of the village derived his authority from the government, and not from the people, as in the case of the head bachelor. Fearing that he might fall into disfavour with the rulers of the land by reason of these frequent breaches of the peace, the headman took the matter into his own hands, and, as the simplest remedy, ordered Ba Saw and Pwā Cho to quit the village. No doubt it was an excess of jurisdiction on his part, but Ba Saw made no demur, for he felt that life would be unbearable in Tanbin village. That afternoon, he yoked up his two stalwart bullocks, packed Pwā Cho and his other impedimenta into the two-wheeled cart, and drove away in a cloud of dust.

Out through the gateway of the village stockade, straight across the open fields of rice-stubble, Ba Saw drove heedlessly. The terrified bullocks, each with an eye turned back to watch the fearsome driver, strained their humps against the yoke and snorted to each other: "Pull, brother, pull; he's gad-fly bitten, mad." Over the sun-baked mud ridges that separated the fields, the cart leapt, bumped, groaned and squealed; but never once did Ba Saw pull nose-rope, for the hateful village was still in sight.

For two miles he held on straight ahead, till the walls of jungle, that guarded all the out-

skirts of the open plain, ran round on either hand and rose up ahead of the fugitives, as if seeking to cut off their escape. The fields narrowed to a winding glade; the swarming jungle followed the cart on each side and closed in upon it, nearer and nearer, seemingly making short rushes forward and then falling back, till the clearing ended abruptly in a ten-foot wall of grass. The cart charged headlong into the grass, and the plunging bullocks forced their way through the tangle till the axle struck against a tree-trunk, with a shock that jolted half the baggage from the cart. The bullocks stood and snorted to each other, while Ba Saw climbed down and gathered up the packages.

"Where are we going?" Pwā Cho asked, with some misgivings in her voice, for she was unaccustomed to the strangeness of the dark jungle.

"What matter?" Ba Saw flung a roll of bed-matting on the cart and climbed up behind the bullocks once again. "There is a village over yonder in the jungle, where dwell Karen people. Methinks they will be friendly" (for the Karens also are a race of slaves). So saying, Ba Saw dug at the bullocks and urged them on through the dark undergrowth. Presently the cart dropped into a disused

track. The bullocks of their own accord followed this road, which eventually brought them into a small clearing, half overgrown with jungle.

In the middle of the clearing stood a deserted hut, gaunt and silent on its four posts. The matting of the walls had fallen away in many places, and the grass thatch hung in tatters, but the ladder that reached up from the ground to the floor was still intact. The bullocks stopped of their own accord, and Ba Saw went forward to inspect the building. "No one lives here now, methinks," he said.

"Let us stay here." Pwā Cho was convinced that any place would be better than that painful bullock-cart.

Without any further remark, Ba Saw unyoked the bullocks, tied their nose-ropes together, and let them wander in search of grass, while he unloaded his belongings: a basket of rice, an earthen pot or two, a roll of matting, a dā, and a favourite canoe-paddle. With such simple luggage it is easy enough to change house. He carried all these up the ladder into the house, and then returned to his bullocks and, taking hold of their nose-ropes, led them away in search of water.

On the further side of the clearing the



ground dipped into a hollow, along the bottom of which a stream of water trickled. Ba Saw led the bullocks down to the water, bathed them, and scrubbed their flanks with a bunch of grass.

The beasts seemed uneasy, and snuffed the air as if they scented some lurking danger. Ba Saw left them for a moment, and searched along the sandy shore. A deer had come down here to drink yesterday—the footprints were a day old. In another place were newer tracks—a heavy boar. The turned-in toes of the cloven hoof had dug deep into the ground—the animal had galloped along the shore as if it were alarmed. And there, what were those broad patterns?—a round centre with a fringe of toe-marks? The pugs of a tiger, those were. He, too, had recently passed by, and no doubt the bullocks had caught his scent.

Ba Saw returned to his bullocks, completed their toilet, and led them back to the hut. Then he took up his dā and chopped down several bamboos in the jungle near by, and chipped the branches to sharp spikes; then, dragging them to the hut, he piled them lengthwise around the legs of the building on all four sides, thus forming a tiger-proof cattle-pen beneath the floor of the hut.

It was dark by the time he had finished the work, and, preparing a bed of grass, he led the cattle into their new quarters and then climbed up the ladder to the floor above, where Pwā Cho was waiting with the evening meal of rice.



CHAPTER XIII

THE HUT IN THE CLEARING

Do not administer an oath on the religious book to hunters: they may be made to imprecate evil on themselves by their own weapons—if they break their engagement some accident from their own weapons is likely to happen to them.

Law of Evidence in the "Damathat."

THE meal was finished, and it was night. Ba Saw sat at the open front of the hut and looked forth into the dark jungle. Pwā Cho could scarcely see him, but she could tell by his breathing that he was listening to every little sound, by his movements he seemed uneasy. He got up, crossed over the creaking floor, looked out through a gap in the matting of the wall at the back of the hut, and then came back and squatted at the open front again.

"I remember, now, why this house is manless," he said. "It is the Beloo-Ain"—he dropped his voice, and breathed the name in a whisper. "Last year a jungle man lived here. He was a bad man, and followed not the

Dharma of Buddha—for he was a hunter, and took the lives of animals. One night he was slain. Nobody knows how he died; but he was gone, and the house stood empty. Then, one early morning, a man came into the village nearly dead with fear. He was passing by this house (he said) at night, when suddenly the air grew cold, and a fearful thing sprang out of the jungle. Its body was shaped like a deer; sambur's horns it had, too; but its face was something like a man—like the man who once lived here. It was a Thayay—he who killed the deer had become a Thayay. That is why this house is empty, and men call it the Beloo-Ain" (the Devil-House).

"His bad deeds had followed him, as Buddha said," Pwā Cho whispered tremulously. For everybody knows of the punishment that awaits hunters who commit the sin of taking life, and most good folk hang up inside their houses a Beloogoung—a fierce, half human visage made of painted clay surmounted by a pair of horns—to remind their children that "Kill not" is the chief of Buddha's precepts.

"Methinks I felt that cold air just now," Ba Saw muttered, between his clenched teeth.

A breath of night-breeze stirred the leaves in the dark jungle round the clearing and stole across the open space. Passing like an



invisible hand over the tops of the clumps of whispering grass, it felt its way inside the hut and groped round, as with clammy, dew-soaked fingers. The bullocks beneath the hut stamped and snorted restlessly. Ba Saw put his mouth to a gap between the bamboos of the floor and chirruped softly, to quiet the beasts.

A sudden cry echoed through the jungle—a hoarse, ringing shout ; then another, followed by the trip-trip of hoofs lightly galloping over the hard ground. Something passed across the clearing and plunged into the dark jungle to the right of the hut. "Gyee" (a "barking deer") Ba Saw muttered. "There was fear in the sound of its feet—it runs away from something." He craned forth from the hut to hear what direction the animal was taking.

With a quick jerk, he reached back with his hand and grasped his dā ; then he crouched forward again, rigid. Hark ! there was another sound. Some other thing was breaking through the jungle, coming straight towards the hut. Crack ! a dead branch snapped ; but the foot-falls made no sound of hoofs ; and the thing came straight on, without pausing to listen or snuff the air, as an animal would. Rattle-tat —a bamboo-twig sprang back as something pushed past it. It had gone behind the dark clump of bamboos and passed into the tall

grass. The grass swished as it forced its way through.

A dark object emerged from the blackness of the jungle, and moved across the starlit clearing. And see! another followed, then a third! There were three of them coming straight towards the hut, advancing in silence, one behind another. Were they men? They seemed to walk on hind-legs; but those huge heads were unhuman—shapeless, black monstrosities. Now they had stopped, and were growling to each other. Then one of the three came forward alone, and quietly moved towards the foot of the ladder.

Ba Saw sprang up and rapped the wood-work with his dā: "Bay thoo lay?"

The black figure stepped back, as if startled; then a voice came in answer: "Choo-daw tha" (Men from Choodaw, the Karen village in the jungle).

"Why come you here at this time?"

"We are on the home road, but 'sky has shut,' and we wish to sleep here." Without waiting for an answer, the strange man climbed the ladder, and his two companions came up after him.

"It is dark," the first man said. "Where is the lamp?"

The second man struck a match, and applied



it to an oil-wick which he carried in his hand. The smoky flame flared and lit up the swarthy faces of the group, accentuating by dark shadows the prominent cheek-bones, wide nostrils, and heavy jaws. The rough head-cloths twisted round their towsled locks, and the dark colour of their garments, betokened that they were, in truth, Karens. One carried a bundle on a bamboo across his shoulder; another had brought a string of hard, black lumps, which he hung up on a projecting spike of the wall, as he proceeded to make himself at home; the third held a gun—a Winchester repeater. They conversed in low tones in Karennee; then the gun-man addressed Ba Saw in Burmese.

"We are hungry."

Ba Saw put back his dā, went down the ladder, and stirred up the ashes of the fire on the ground outside, while Pwā Cho, with ready Burmese hospitality, made preparations for the meal.

Though the rice was a long time boiling, not a word was spoken. The strangers sat close together. One of them had folded his arms around his knees and lowered his chin down to them, as if he were asleep; the man with a gun wiped the barrel slowly with an unrolled end of his headgear, while the third

man bent over the guttering oil-wick on the floor beside him and squeezed a thorn from the sole of his foot.

At length the rice was ready, and the steaming bowl placed on the floor in front of the guests. They made no sign of thanks; nor were thanks expected, for it is but customary to extend hospitality to all—friends or foes. They thrust the steamy handfuls into their mouths like men that were hungry, till by degrees their backs were straightened. Then, one after another, they shuffled away from the bowl, and belched to show their satisfaction.

Pwā Cho rose up, poured a little water into the rice-pot, swilled it, and emptied the contents out of doors, while Ba Saw produced a small, round, lacquer box, and silently placed it on the floor before his guests. The man with the gun reached out a hand and took the box. He seemed to be the chief of the three, and the gun, his badge of office, had never left his possession for a moment. He pulled off the lid of the box, took a small, green leaf from inside, smeared it with a dab of lime, picked out some peppercorns and a lump of betel-nut, rolled all up together in the leaf, and thrust the bunch into the side of his mouth.



The next man pulled the box towards himself, prepared a similar selection, and passed it on to the third. They chewed steadily, till by degrees the size of the mouthfuls grew less apparent, and expectoration became needful. This was a sign that the time for speech was at hand.

Ba Saw, thickly: "Where from?"

The gun-man: "From the southward—the market village."

"Buying?"

"No; selling."

Ba Saw chewed on this for some time, then said, "Selling what?"

The gun-man pointed to the string of black lumps hanging on the wall: "Game-flesh."

Ba Saw showed no surprise. All Karens are hunters; they think it no sin, for they are not Buddhists; their dharma is the same as that of the white folk—Christian.

"Get many rupees?" Ba Saw ventured.

The gun-man patted the breast pocket of his dingy garment. "Four rupees, to-day."

Ba Saw pondered deeply; then, "Hunters will be rich men?" he queried, musingly.

"We are not; but He is."

"Who?"

"The Scripture Teacher."

"Is he, then, skilled in hunting?

"No; but we are." The gun-man seemed to consider the conclusion to be so obvious that any further expenditure of words was unjustified; but Ba Saw scratched his head with a searching finger—there was a premise missing somewhere.

"We give everything to the Scripture Teacher," the three Karens chanted together, intoning the words through their noses in a way that indicated long practice and left no doubt that this main tenet of their dharma had been thoroughly drubbed into them by the missionary.

"No," the gun-man explained, "He does not hunt, and He does not like to sit in the tree all night; but He lends the gun to us."

The Karen patted the weapon with pride, for it is a great thing to carry a gun; and besides, the law forbids it—except for white men.

The lamp gave a sudden splutter, and the gun-man seemed to be reminded of something; he spoke to the other men, who grunted assent to his proposal. He then solemnly produced a small black book from the bag at his waist; he laid the book on the floor in front of him, opened it, and turned the leaves over slowly, while the other two Karens bent down to the cracks in the floor and relieved their mouths. With a preparatory growl, the



gun-man started gabbling in the strange Karennee dialect—evidently reading aloud out of the book.

Ba Saw discreetly retired. He crossed leisurely over to the back of the room, for Pwā Cho was beckoning to him. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Sit near me," Pwā Cho commanded.

Ba Saw complied, bumping down on his heels, and then asked, "Why?"

"I do not like those men." Pwā Cho, with eyes like a startled doe, was watching every movement on the part of the Karens.

"Are you afraid of them?"

"They are big and fierce."

"I am big, too"—Ba Saw slapped his right arm and gripped his muscle—"and fierce." But the expression of his distorted countenance was lost upon Pwā Cho.

"But there are three of them." She was still alarmed.

"I am as good as three." Ba Saw shamelessly made capital out of her fears.

"What are they doing, all huddled together like that?"

"Payāshikō—they are praying to their god." Ba Saw had seen Karens before, and knew it was their custom to pray every evening before the light went out.

"But look at him now!"

The gun-man was truly a disturbing sight. He had ceased reading; and now he took a deep breath, threw his head back, opened his mouth wide, and gave forth a long note high up in the scale. The other two voices clutched it, hung on and swayed till they steadied, then all three swung away in a hymn.

"They sing like dogs to the moon," Pwā Cho remarked irreverently. "Tha-wee-taw," she imitated them softly.

"But they are good men," said Ba Saw, with a firm conviction.

"How can they be good men, being hunters?"

"'Tis their dharma; their dharma does not say that it is sinful to kill."

"Then it is not a good dharma."

"No matter. Men may be good men, whatever their dharma be."

CHAPTER XIV

A JOURNEY TO TANBIN

Let no man ever take into consideration whether a thing is pleasant or unpleasant. The love of pleasure begets grief, and dislike of pain causes fear.

Gospel of Buddha.

THE month of February brought Jackson to the village of Tanbin.

Jackson's billet at the Judson College was a temporary appointment, and with a little forethought he might have prepared himself for its inevitable termination. But he "couldn't be bothered"; and consequently, at the end of January he found himself out of employment. For two weeks he hunted for work among the offices in Rangoon, high and low, without success, and at last his one and only hope was Finsen's paddy-mill. Finsen said he could "give him a job if he knew Burmese," and (Finsen suggested) the best way to learn Burmese would be to migrate to some jungle village for a month or so. Tanbin was the village of Jackson's choice, for (as he said) the Tanbin men were "jolly good sportsmen and

had made a fine race against the 'four'"; and besides, there was some good shooting to be had in the Tanbin district.

So, with his camp equipment and gun, Jackson went aboard one of those two-decked, spoon-bowed, mud-grubbing steamers that afforded the only means of communication with Tanbin. The journey took more than a day, for the steamer, being the jungle-omnibus, had to run into the bank to pick up any stray Burman who appeared from the jungle and waved his head-band, and each passenger insisted upon being put down right at the ladder of his hut, even if it were but fifty yards from the last stopping-place. But Jackson was disappointed to find that he could not be taken right up to Tanbin: the creek was too shallow, as the Chittagonian serang explained, with an upward jerk of his two black paws. There was nothing for it but to land at the village of Wa-taw, and have the boxes piled on a two-wheeled bullock-cart.

"The cart-ride from Wa-taw to Tanbin will occupy a 'betel-nut chew,'" the bare-backed Burman driver remarked as, putting that pungent time-piece into his mouth, he climbed on to the pole of the cart between the flanks of the bullocks, seized their nose-ropes, and with a word of encouragement, started them off at a



trot, with a "ting-tong-tong" of neck-bells and tiger-scaring groans and squeals from the ungreased wooden axle.

The choice of "road" was left to the bullocks, for the wheels of the cart followed in the footsteps of the beasts, and what was best for them was best for the cart as well—namely, straight through the jungle, over rocks and roots, down the steep bank of a stony gorge and hard up the other side, through seas of ten-foot kaing-grass, bang against fallen tree-trunks . . . till Jackson, seated on the spring-less cart with his legs dangling over at the back, longed to cry "Hold, enough!" in spite of his having taken the precaution of stuffing the seat of his breeches with a good padding of straw.

At length he arrived at Tanbin, and the groaning cart dragged its tired limbs down the village street. On either side of the street the grass-and-bamboo huts were scattered in an irregular row, with palms and peepul-trees here and there. Behind the huts, on the right-hand side, the river ran parallel with the road, and on the land side the village was surrounded by a stockade—an eight-foot wall made of split bamboos closely interwoven and sharpened to spikes—a formidable obstacle to tigers and other cattle-thieves.

Like a stick dragged across an ant-heap, the

passing of the cart stirred the village to sudden life. Naked black children ran out and stared, and then ran back shouting the news that "kala" (a stranger) had come. Gaunt yellow-dogs dashed from under the huts, barking furiously; and a mob of huge-horned black buffaloes cantered ahead, then wheeled in the centre of the road and stood, with heads thrown up, red eye-balls glaring, and nostrils dilated, questioning the unhuman scent of this strange European. The phalanx of black bodies and thumping horns advanced towards the cart with evidently hostile intentions; but, at the critical moment, a little Burman child ran in front of the herd and, with a "Hek, chway," and a whack on the nose, reminded them of the respect due to humans.

CHAPTER XV

THE REST-HOUSE

Buddha said to Anâthapindada:

The charitable man is loved by all, and his friendship greatly prized; he suffers no repentance, and in death his heart is at rest.

The highest and best degree of charity is that without self-interest. What your heart inclines you now to do, let it be quickly done and well completed.

Practise the art of "giving up"; for giving up desire is the joy of perfect rest (Nirvana).

S. BEAL (*from the "Fo-sho-hing-tsan-king"*).

JACKSON had made his quarters at the "rest-house," a bamboo-and-matting structure erected (out of the fulness of Burman charity) for the convenience of any travellers who might happen to come along. There was but one style of architecture in the village, and, in accordance with that design, the "rest-house" was built on posts, three sides were walled with matting, the roof was thatched with grass hanging low over the open front, and the floor (of split bamboos, round-side upwards, and spaced at dangerously wide intervals) was some five feet off the ground. To enter the

hut, one had to jump on to the stump of a palmyra-palm, and then scramble on to the platform outside the front of the hut.

Nobody seemed to know who had conceived the idea of building the rest-house, but all claimed a share of the "merit" on the ground of having lent a hand in its construction. But that was many years ago, and as no travellers ever came to the village, the merit had run to waste, and the roof and walls had fallen to pieces. So Jackson's arrival caused great satisfaction, and every able-bodied man set to work to patch up the roof and walls, while the village maidens took turns to bring water from the river daily, for the purpose of filling the water-pots in the hut and taking a look at the strange European, with his yellow moustache, blue eyes, and childish manner of pronouncing the simplest of Burmese words.

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To-day, half the village had gathered at the hut, for it was blazing noon, and there was nothing to do but to sit and watch the habits of the "Thakin." Inside the hut a crowd of brown bodies sat on their heels uncomfortably near to Jackson, who was lying on the floor with his back to the wall and his knees drawn up. He was engaged in writing a letter on a gun-case across his knees. At his right



hand a muscular Burman sat and held the inkpot in his two hands, and another had taken up a position between the writer's knees and was peering over the top of the paper, watching the wonderful agility displayed by the pen as it ran over the paper, leaving tracks behind it like a lame beetle in the dust.

The letter began :

"LATITUDE 18° N.
"LONGITUDE 95° 30′ E.

"DEAR WOOD,—

"I failed to discover your whereabouts before I left Rangoon. The baboo at the Pegu Club told me that you had gone 'up-country looking for gold,' but I hope this letter will find you out."

Here Jackson had to break off to examine the end of his pen (nibs get so horridly rusty, even in the dry season).

"The pen is not good"—the man between Jackson's knees generously turned to hand the information to those in a less fortunate position—"the pen is not good." The instrument in question was gently removed from Jackson's hands and passed round for inspection. Someone produced a heavy dā, and began to scrape the rust from the nib, but gave it up as a bad job, and handed it to "Old Tough Cocoa-nut," the headman, who

was counted an authority in these matters. But the headman shirked the responsibility.

"The ink is bad." He took possession of the inkpot, and stirred the contents with his finger. "It wants water." Some obliging person at the back went over to the water-pot and brought back a ladleful—a half cocoa-nut shell impaled on a stick—and a generous quantity was added to the ink. Jackson rescued the pen just in time to save it from being used as an ear-scoop, and resumed the writing with some difficulty.

"I have been driven from Rangoon by the winds of necessity and stranded on this jungly shore." . . . Then followed the facts. . . . "If you have nothing to do, just come along here, and I will promise you some good sport. There's a tiger prowling about. I have been after him several times, and he has been after me, but if one of us don't catch the other, we shall both be ready for you.

"Yours,

"T. J."

Jackson mopped the perspiration from his wrist, and looked about him with relief to find that the crowd had somewhat dispersed. The interest in his penmanship had flagged, and most of the spectators had waddled on their



heels across to the back of the room to examine the tin-opener that Mr. Squirrel was exhibiting, with the air of a showman.

"Moung Shin" (Mr. Squirrel) had, of his own accord, installed himself as Jackson's personal attendant; and, having proved himself useful in culinary matters—such as the boiling of rice—he had been raised to the full dignity of custodian of cooking-pots.

The heat was appalling. The glare from the scorched ground outside seemed to burn the eyes out of their sockets. Underneath the house, the yellow-dog (Kway) lay with his long, red tongue quivering and his flanks working like a pair of bellows; near him, a scraggy fowl stood with eyes shut and tail down. It was a truce between them; if anything fell through the floor neither of them had the energy to go and see if it was eatable.

Jackson looked for the water-bottle, which he had carefully hung up in a cool place. Alas, it also was undergoing an inspection. To be sure, it was made of queer "white iron," as light as a feather, and had a cloth jacket that unbuttoned just like a man's, but still, there was no need to hold it upside down and search the inside with a finger—there was nothing there, worse luck.

"Will Thakin eat this?" Squirrel waddled

forward and held out an unopened tin, while the crowd gathered round with interest. Jackson managed to explain that it was too hot to eat anything, but, seeing the crestfallen looks on the faces of all, he gave way, and called upon Squirrel to produce the boiled fowl that had been cooked this morning: he would eat the fowl, but not that tin of cooking lard—NO! Not for anybody. The crowd were evidently disappointed; no doubt Mr. Squirrel had worked upon their imaginations in describing the nature of the contents of the tin; however, they gathered round to watch the performance of eating the fowl—for it is always interesting to see the skilful way in which the knife cuts off bits of flesh from the fowl's leg bone; then the fork jumps on to them and carries them to the mouth, the fingers never once touching the food.

CHAPTER XVI

A "CONVERT"

A wise man halts on one foot while he moves the other: one should not quit a present abode without carefully thinking about the next.

Dharmaniti.

The five dangers that beset travellers are: want of water, want of food, robbers, deserts, and Beloo.

Burmese Proverb.

Of the five travellers' evils, want of food (strange to say) proved to be the chief source of difficulty to Ba Saw and Pwā Cho at the "Beloo-house."

The "Thayay" demon (the ghostly form of the previous occupant of the hut who had come to an untimely death whilst hunting) had not yet put in an appearance, and in all probability had abandoned this region for "fresh woods and pastures new." So Ba Saw had set to work to make the dwelling more suited to occupants of flesh and blood in the ordinary human form. Materials for repairs grew close at hand, and with a dā and common-sense a Burman can work wonders.

Palm-leaves and kaing-grass made a very good thatch, and bamboos, split and hammered flat, may be plaited into mats wherewith to cover the bare bones of walls.

As for food, rice was essential and all-sufficient. Ba Saw had severed himself from all connections with that hateful village of Tanbin, but rice could be purchased from the Karen village further in the jungle. But the day came when Ba Saw discovered that he had no money left. His bullocks and cart, too, had been seized and sold by the "chetty" from whom he had borrowed money in Rangoon. However, the Karens, in simple kindness, gave him rice whenever he came and asked for it, and the trouble was bridged over for the time.

But, one day, Ba Saw was surprised to find a change in their attitude towards him. "The Scripture Teacher," they said, "has ordered that no food shall be given to 'heathens.' You must come and be a Christian."

Ba Saw was perplexed. He had no wish to change his dharma, and had always held aloof from the ceremonies of this new religion; for, in some respects, he agreed with Pwā Cho that "it was not a good dharma"; at any rate, Buddha's precepts were sound enough. Besides that, Ba Saw had not taken a fancy to the "Scripture Teacher." The latter was



a white man, with a black beard and a long nose, through which he spoke with a jarring twang, and he had but lately settled in the village. The old "Scripture Teacher," who had sown the first seeds of the new religion in the village, was now dead. This new man had arrived one day quite unexpectedly, as if, in truth, he had been "sent from heaven." He showed no credentials, but he knew the Scriptures, and could talk Karennee; so the villagers had accepted him, and acknowledged his authority without question. But to Ba Saw a knowledge of Scripture was no testimonial, and some animal instinct made him distrust the man.

"He makes the people give him all they have," Ba Saw said one day to Pwā Cho, seeking to find a reason for his aversion.

"What wrong? We Buddhists, likewise, give freely to the ponjees."

"But the Scripture Teacher gathers money from the people"—which was indisputably unclerical and wrong.

So, after hearing the ultimatum of the Karens, Ba Saw left the village with an empty rice-basket and returned to his hut perplexed. For some days the boycotted couple lived on scraps, but this could not go on for long. Rice would not grow during the dry season, and of

other food there was next to none—unless Ba Saw took to hunting. This alternative had, perhaps, occurred to him, but he had not breathed the terrible suggestion, for Buddha's precept, "Kill not, but have regard for life," was deeply ingrained in his system. However, something must be done.

He was pondering deeply one night, after an unwholesome meal of bamboo seeds. The hut was in darkness; for when there is no money for rice, neither is there oil for a lamp. Pwā Cho was curled up somewhere in the corner; and Ba Saw, from the sound of his grunts, was squatting at the front of the hut laboriously thinking. The ceaseless wuzz-buzz of insects filled the air, mosquitoes hummed a doleful chorus, and a night-bird counted the passing minutes—" toop-toop "—with clear smooth notes, like drops of dew.

In the living blackness of the night the fire-flies came and went. First one, then another, would burst alight in mid-air and flit softly by, some lingering, some passing swiftly, in unforetold directions, like wandering thoughts that flicker through a tranquil mind: out of the dark mystery of unseen origins they unexpectedly appear; their erratic path holds the eye for an instant; then they vanish as others flash into notice.



But Ba Saw's mind was by no means tranquil, and there was no mystery about the origin of his thoughts: they could be traced back directly to the uncomfortable sensation in his interior. Pwā Cho could not see "her man," but by some subtle telepathy she seemed conscious of the mental ebullition that was taking place within him, and sat quiet with her "ears pricked up," waiting for a clue. Presently a bubble came to the surface of his mind, and burst: "'Tis hard—this dharma!"

"Which?"

"Ours, of course. In theirs—in the Karen's dharma—all is made easy." He fairly boiled over. "They may hunt; they may kill the boar and deer. Meat they have in abundance; and they may sell it to make money, too."

"But it is wrongful to take the life of animals."

"For those that follow their dharma, it is not wrong. Even I might do so if I, to-morrow, went to the Scripture Teacher and said, "See, I have come—make me a Christian."

Pwā Cho was silent with amazement: this, then, was the awful thing with which her man was fighting! In frantic haste she thrust a weapon of argument into his hand.

"If it is wrong to kill, it *is* wrong."

"But the dharma——"

"The dharma must be bad."

"But no harm comes to the Karens."

"When his evil deed has ripened, then the evil-doer sees his punishment—thus Buddha said. They will become Thayay—that we know."

A hush fell upon them both at the sound of that dreadful name Thayay, that seemed to have rushed forth into the night to call its owner. Ba Saw sat in paralytic silence for a while. Then he began to speak in a low voice and broken sentences, as if groping for a sheltering thought; slowly and half doubtingly he muttered: "He says—'tis part of the new dharma—that there are no such things as those." Ba Saw could not bring himself to utter the names of Beloos or Nāts.

"He knows nothing — that Scripture Teacher," Pwā Cho broke in impatiently; "from towns, from other lands he comes; he does not know this jungle."

"But the Karens follow him, and have no fear," Ba Saw said thoughtfully. "See now," with growing confidence, "if I become Christian we need fear for none of these things; and, what's more, we shall have rice in plenty."

"Big Brother,"—Pwā Cho's voice seemed to have grown weak and broken—"do not forsake the Path."

But Ba Saw's voice was free from doubts: "Rice we must have. Mortals cannot live in a state of Zan: even now, methinks, I heard a voice as of one who faints from hunger."

There was no denial, and for some time both sat in silence; then Pwā Cho said, "I see a way. Go you to the Scripture Teacher, and say, 'I have come to learn.' If you, in your mind, say, 'I will not forsake the dharma of Buddha,' there will be no harm, and we shall have the rice."

The very posts of the hut rattled as Ba Saw jerked himself round. "A thief's trick!" he exclaimed. "No man would do so mean a thing."

With a sigh Pwā Cho sank back, as if exhausted. For a long time Ba Saw sat, breathing hard and shifting restlessly. Then he rose up and, in the darkness, passed across the creaking bamboos of the floor towards the corner where the water-pot was kept. The ladle rattled several times against the mouth of the jar; for Ba Saw drank deep, like one who has come out of a hard battle. Then he stepped firmly across the floor, as a man would whose mind is bound up with tight knots that do not come undone. He settled down in the sleeping-place, rolled his head in the mosquito-cloth, and at once fell sound asleep.

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Next day at noon, Ba Saw returned from the Karen village with a full basket of rice. "They will give us plenty now," he said, with a cheerful manner. But Pwā Cho would not look at him, and made no answer.



CHAPTER XVII

NĀTS

The distinguished Cowherd said: "The Toung-thoo, the gardener, is the owner of the land and all that grows upon it. But everybody knows that, when the first leaves (of a tree) spring (above the ground), the tree is given over to the Yōkaso to watch and ward under the orders of Wet-tha-woon-na and his Nāt chieftains. And it is the custom that any one who comes under the tree, and breaks or thoughtlessly stays in the tree, shall make an offering in the form of a gift that is made to Beloos and Nāts, or else the Yōkaso shall have a right to eat him."

The Burmese Damathat, or Laws of Manoo.

BA SAW was digging a pit.

Crouching on all fours in a dark tunnel where the narrow game-path burrowed through a clump of jungle, he dug with silent energy.

Out in the open glade, where the noon-day sun was blazing with a white-hot fierceness, the ground was hard and dry. The game-track, winding thread-like among the clumps of scorched, yellow grass, was scarce discernible and, to a casual glance, showed nothing but the scars of last year's footprints. But where the pathway dived beneath the jungle, perpetual

twilight cast a gloom. No ray of sunshine ever penetrated that dense roof of leaves and tangled creepers, arching low and dark; and here the ground was moist and soft, and distinctly showed the marks of fresh foot-prints—narrow, oblong hoof-marks, by twos and twos in pairs—the hoofs of the deer and wild boar that passed this way by night.

In the middle of the tunnelled pathway Ba Saw was digging a pit. He loosened the earth with a sharpened pole, scooped it up in his hands, and threw it into the jungle on either side.

The squirrels overhead knew well what he was doing. Hither and thither they ran along the creepers and peered down at him, clucking loudly with regret and sorrow. A jungle-cock, alighting at the entrance of the tunnel, for an instant stood motionless with shocked amazement, then scurried off beneath the jungle with quick feet pattering over the dead leaves.

Other things were watching too. Unseen Eyes were peering from behind the silent leaves. In the darkness of the tangled jungle all around, the Nāts were lurking, watching every movement. Every sound they heard, every word they caught, every thought. They knew why Ba Saw was digging a pit in the middle of the game-path; and Ba Saw knew that they knew.

He knew, too, that he was trespassing—a poacher on the Nāts' preserves; but he had asked for leave and license. On the ground at the entrance of the tunnel lay a strip of plantain leaf, with a handful of cooked rice piled upon it. This was the simple offering that he had made when he begged for permission, ere he set to work, to make the trap to catch the deer and boar.

For without the aid of Nāts, the hunter labours but in vain. They it is who tell the deer of the trap that lies before them. They it is who dog the footsteps of the hunter who offends them, and thickly strew his path with rustling leaves and cracking twigs, that warn the game of his approach. They it is who hunt the hunter with the stealthy tracking panther, and lie in wait to stab him with the poison-fangs of cobras. And woe betide him when, benighted, he gropes blindly through the jungle. In the darkness, they surround him, seize and kill him and devour him, and no trace is left to show what was the fate that overtook him—no sign but the marks of his foot-steps that ended so abruptly.

For the Nāts are jealous gods. But—like most gods—they are easily appeased by some slight token of submission: a simple offering of food laid out upon the ground, where they

may gather, all unseen, and feast upon the essence and the fragrance.

No human eye has ever seen them; but they may be heard oft-times sighing in the tree-tops, and groaning in the branches. When the wind blows strong, in wanton jest they throw down branches on the passer-by, and the hunter who sits in the tree by night is often jerked to the ground just when sleep has closed his eyes.

The lonely woodman often hears the stealthy movements of the Nāts; for his ears are awake, and his senses all alert for signs of danger and warnings of the approach of savage beasts.

Where the narrow, winding deer-path tunnels darkly through the bushes, the ear must keep on guard, and be quick to read the message from the voices in the jungle all around: the groan of the tiger, when it rumbles in the valley; the chuckle of the squirrel and the short, hoarse bark of deer. Every little sound must be caught and understood; every footfall must be heard and judged arightly—though the feet of "Chet," the jungle-fowl, often make a pit-pat like a short, crisp tread of "Wet," the fierce wild boar.

But other sounds are often heard: cricks and cracks, and taps and tips, among the fallen twigs. 'Tis not the step of beast or bird, nor yet the growing jungle stretching out its



twisted limbs; some Feet unknown are stealing cautiously behind that screen of leaves. No creature can be seen, but the leaves are gently trembling as Something moves from branch to branch. There's a stealthy tread behind one! a snuffle and a sigh! What can it be but Nāts?

The belief is as old as man. It is a fear of Nature—the mystic, living force that the Burman woodman feels everywhere around him; the unmastered force that surges in all the rampant life of the tropical jungle. In the towering teak-trees and thrusting shoots of bamboo; in the strangling arms of creepers and the groping, stealthy roots.

It is this untamed, irresistible force that the jungle-dweller dreads—this malignant hostile force. For of what count is man? Those mocking walls of jungle stand all around his little clearing and advance, step by step, with a merciless persistence. With short-lived energy he may drive them back a pace; but while he rests, the triumphant undergrowth returns to take its own. He cannot even claim a right-of-way, for the pathway that he cuts is filled up again at once. He must creep along the game-paths like the other animals, and must take his chance of life with them, for there is no law to shield him but the law of the jungle—that of

strength and cunning. Small wonder that he prays for mercy and hopes for help from those Unhuman Beings that personify the forces whose effect he sees, but whose real nature only fancy can conceive.

Nature is the Nāt. Nature will be kind and helpful if her laws are obeyed; but she can be terrible in retribution, and none knows how to resist her in the end.

"Scripture Teachers" may denounce the jungle deities and forbid these offerings and rites, but while the jungle is the jungle, the causes that gave rise to this belief still work upon the mind of the simple jungle Burman. No veneer of religion will alter the substratum of superstition.

Openly and honestly Ba Saw had joined the ranks of the Christian Karens, and had adopted the new religion; but his inmost thoughts were still the same. He had but changed his uniform; the old coat, that had felt too tight, had been laid aside for a looser garment that seemed more suited to the circumstances, but the man inside it was the same. The framework of firm convictions, developed by a life of converse with the jungle, was still the base of all his thoughts; the same motive-power of beliefs and fears moved and guided him.

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When the narrow pit was waist deep, Ba Saw ceased to dig, and took up some half-dozen bamboo-stakes that he had thrust into the jungle beside him. Driving holes into the bottom of the pit, he planted the stakes firmly, points upwards. Then, with twigs and slips of bamboo, he carefully plaited a flimsy covering over the mouth of the pit; and finally, he sprinkled leaves and earth over all to hide his handiwork.

Creeping on all fours, he emerged into the sunshine, stood up, stretched, tucked up his clothing, and stuck his dā in the waist of his cloth behind, against his naked back. He turned towards the offering that he had placed upon the ground; squatting on his heels, he put his two hands, palms together, in front of his face, and muttered something between his fingers; then, with humility, he raised the offering from the ground with both hands and rested it in the fork of a tree near by.

Before he departed homewards, he cut from the jungle a stick shaped somewhat like an arrow, and laid it on the ground across the path; for the ancient Laws of Manoo say:

"Regarding the oopaza" (the bounds, vicinity, and range) "of hunting-grounds—

"O excellent king! . . . The hunter on

dry land shall not set his engines without a written notice: the writing shall either be suspended on a tree or cut into it, and shall indicate the road that may be travelled with safety. He shall also make a collection of sharpened bamboos, sticks whose points have been hardened with fire, stones, or bricks; and on seeing them, travellers, wanderers in the jungle, and cultivators, will know that they are placed for marks or guides, and will follow the road indicated. . . . If he do not give warning in this way, let him replace the value of the man."—*The Burmese Damathat, or Laws of Manoo.*



CHAPTER XVIII

JUNGLE-FOWL

O excellent king! in another case: amongst fowlers who catch birds by means of a gin, net, bird-lime, arrows blown through a tube, the pellet-bow or sling—they are not required to affix notices.

The oopaza of decoy birds is the space between them and where the fowler watches them.

Damathat, or Laws of Manoo.

BA SAW had trained a jungle-cock to the duties of a decoy, and every evening he set forth into the jungle with the fowl inside a bag kicking in expostulation.

The fowler must proceed with caution, for jungle-cock are as shy as sambur. One must creep along the twisting game-path, crouched low down upon one's heels; and it is best to leave one's clothes at home—all except the lonjee doubled up about the loins with the dā stuck in behind. The fowl-bag should be slung about one's neck, for both hands are needed to put aside the thorny creepers and noisy branches. Both eyes must choose the softest places for the silent feet, and peer



ahead into the dense wall of jungle, and behind, for Chā, the tiger, comes this way sometimes. Both ears must be alert and listen to sounds close at hand, and sounds further off——Ah! did you hear that? . . . There it is again—a shrill crowing far away. Taw Chet, that is—a jungle-fowl: no fat-bellied, house-bred fowl could crow like that.

Here is a good place, where the jungle opens back—a narrow sward of rotting leaves, with bamboos arching darkly overhead. Lay down the bag and put your hand inside—beware of Chet: his spurs are sharp, and he kicks in anger and impatience. Take out the snares: little pegs of bamboo-slips with pliant tapering tops of fern-stems and running noose of hair, twelve or more at a span apart, joined by a string. Stick them upright in the ground in a circle, and see that the nooses are running free. Now pull out Chet by the string on his foot. His feathers are all ruffled, and he opens one indignant eye, then sneezes gently like the bursting of a seed-pod. He's all right. Tether him in the middle of the magic circle. And, when all is done, remember to give something to the Nāts—a little piece of betel-nut will do, for they know that we are poor. Then go quietly down the wind, and sink into the jungle with your eyes only



looking out, and wait. Leave the rest to Chet, and wait.

Chet has been watching you, and now you're settled, he begins. He shakes his feathers, sending out a little cloud of dust; then he buttons up his waistcoat with his beak, and starts to walk away. But he had forgotten that string on his foot. He stops, and gives the knot a peck, and examines it with one eye, but can't see how to undo it. He makes the best of his freedom, however, and scratches in the leaves.

To be a fowler, one must have a lot of patience and a little chew of betel-nut to pass the time. Chet seems a long while getting to work. He is wasting his time with scratching about among the leaves, and pecking this and that. He seems to think he has been pegged out to draw pictures on the ground.

But look! He stops and jerks his head up. (How silent is the jungle!) He flicks his beak round to listen with the other side of his head. Can you hear anything? There!—faintly, far away. Chet drops his tail, jerks out the back of his neck, and lets off a shrill, piercing crow that echoes through the jungle.

Wait and listen. There's an answer!—nearer. Chet sounds the clarion of defiance once again, and tugs at his string impatiently.

But it seems that the challenge is not accepted. Chet crows again, and stamps round, treading on his wing; but no answer comes. We must be resigned to wait a little longer.

Stop! there's a "pit-pat"—"pit-pat-pat" again: rapid footsteps in the leaves behind the bushes. Chet lowers his neck and beak like a lance in rest, and ruffles out his feathers.

Suddenly a gaudy jungle-cock runs out and leaps into the air, all spurs and beak, claws, wings and feathers. What a glorious scrapping-match! Chet's down!—no, he's up again; its that string on his leg that hampers him. But look! the stranger's foot is caught in a noose. Now quick! run out and catch him.

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He's a fine fat bird, and something for Chet to peck at in the bag whilst his accomplice gathers up the snares and prepares to go off to some fresh place.



CHAPTER XIX

PITFALLS

Who is the god to whom we shall offer sacrifice?
Vedic Hymn (Mand. x. 121).

AN animal was caught in the pit. Its head and horns showed above the ground in the middle of the pathway—a hog-deer buck, judging by the shape of the horns. Its head moved from side to side weakly, for it had been lying in the trap all night, and it was now early morning.

Grasping his dā, Ba Saw ran across the open and plunged into the tunnel. A scuffle in the darkness, a trampling of jungle, the thuck of a dā that clove to the bone, followed by a plaintive half-human cry of pain, that he who has once heard can never forget; then Ba Saw appeared, backing out of the jungle and dragging by the horns the deer, that kicked and struggled feebly. That deep cut across its back was the work of the dā; the hole in the belly was where a spike in the pit had

pierced upwards through the body, coming out at the loins. Ba Saw dragged his prey into the open, slit its throat, and let go of the horns. The head fell; the wind gurgled in red bubbles from the severed wind-pipe, and the body ceased to kick.

Ba Saw visibly swelled with ownership and pride. "It is mine, it is mine. I have caught it; I have killed it."

He threw down his dā, and danced in quaint, distorted postures, shouting, "Ba Saw, the hunter, the great hunter!" Then he snatched up the dripping dā, cut and parried with it in the air, leaping high and slapping his buttocks with the soles of his feet. He clapped his left hand on his right arm, and broke into the old boat-song: "Loo-la, Chā-la?" (Are we men or are we tigers?)

The dying animal raised its head and gazed at him with large brown eyes full of anguish, full of sorrow and surprise—as a mother looks upon an erring child. Through the anguish-stricken eyes came that look of sad reproach, and behind it welled compassion and forgiveness, as if in very words they said, "Payā, forgive him, for he knows not what he does." Then the head fell back, and the quivering limbs straightened out and stiffened.

At that look Ba Saw stood motionless,



petrified. The dā slipped from his fingers, his jaw dropped, and his eyes grew wide with horror. What had he done? What deed was this?—this awful sin? He looked round him with a quick turn; then remembered. Ah yes, the new dharma: it was no sin. He had changed his dharma, and wrong was right.

With a great effort, he reined back repentance on its haunches; with spasmodic jerks he tightened up his confidence. He stood up straight, and even slapped his arm and forced himself to shout, "Ba Saw is great, and fears none ——" But his voice stopped short, and that last word fled tell-tale through the whispering jungle. He glanced round with a look of sudden fear—those Greater Powers were watching from behind the leaves and noting all his boastful actions!

In a sudden fit of trembling he fell on his knees beside the carcase; he seized his dā, grasped the muzzle of the deer, and with nervous haste began to sever the lips and nose.

"To give to the Nāts, to give to the Nāts—it is the custom," he muttered quickly. "The Nāts' portion is the nose and lips and tongue—'tis the custom."

Then another wave of feeling struck him. Holding the tongue in one hand and the dā

close to it in the other, he raised his head with a look of wondering query: "Is it not the custom—not the new dharma?" he asked the air. "No; the Scripture Teacher said that nothing was to be given to the Nāts." He stood up and faced the jungle: "No; I shall not give any to the Nāts!" he cried defiantly. Then quickly, ere this new determination vanished, he strode towards the jungle, chipped the trunk of a sapling, tore off strips of green bark and, returning to the carcase, tied the feet together. Swinging the body on to his back, he passed his head between the legs and, with a last look behind, hurried homewards.

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In a pathway through the jungle, Ba Saw and his burden had become entangled in the creepers. The game-path was scarcely wide enough for deer or man; and for both together—— Ba Saw struggled frantically forward, as if his one thought was to get through and out the other side, but the tough sinews of the creeper had twisted round his neck and arms and feet. The carcase, too, they held and pulled with fiendish strength, as if seeking to wrest the booty from the man.

Ba Saw turned his head and said aloud, half-angrily, "Cease to pull"; then, with a



quaver of uncertainty, "Do not pull. Let me have it," he pleaded with a nervous tremor. Was he speaking to the creepers, or to what? If the creepers, why not cut them with the dā? If not, what then? "No. You shall not have it," he said, almost fiercely; "not a tongue nor a lip. All is mine. Let go." He charged forward, twisting, squirming, tearing; he burst out of the tangle, tripped, and fell. Quickly turning, he faced round towards the dark opening of the pathway. Suddenly he sank to his heels, and a look of fear and despair passed across his face.

"The dā! The dā! They have got the dā!"

There, dangling from the jungle over the pathway, was the dā. The creepers had twisted round the handle and snatched it from his waist-cloth. It swung and danced in the air as if some unseen Hand were flourishing it, mocking and triumphant. The wretched man shuffled forward: "Give me back my dā," he pleaded; "give me the dā, that I may cut the tongue and lips," he almost whined.

In a sudden frenzy of despair he sprang up, plunged into the thorny tangle, seized the cherished weapon, dragged it, tugged and tore it from the creepers. Then, stooping quickly, he snatched the carcase on to his

back, and dashed headlong through the jungle, as if Evil Conscience and a thousand outraged, angry fiends were pursuing at his heels. Into another dark tunnel he dived blindly. With a crash the ground gave way, and he was swallowed in the earth.

It was one of his own pitfalls.

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Above the ground a hand waved feebly, as if warding off a coming danger. "Payā, Payā," a voice moaned weakly, "they have got me, they have killed me." The hand fell down; the voice grew silent; the clucking squirrels raced away along the boughs, and the jungle all stood still.

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A head rose slowly from the ground, looked back along the path, and at the jungle on each side. Then, by degrees, shoulders rose, with the carcase of a deer hanging awkwardly upon them. Inch by inch and limb by limb, Ba Saw drew himself out of the pit and gathered all his members in a heap beside it. With slow astonishment he looked about him; "I was dead," he muttered, and still he seemed to think so. He raised his hand to his head; found it still intact; then felt his body, piece by piece; tested all his joints,



one by one ; felt slowly down a leg and found a wound—a gash across the shin—that was all. With blank astonishment, he found himself alive ! He got up slowly, on shaking legs, and looked all round him. Then once again he started off along the path. Slowly and cautiously he stepped, scanning every leaf upon the ground, shunning every crack across the earth ; sometimes springing back with horror at a twig that writhed when trodden on as if it were a snake, and anon glancing round behind him.

He was weak and exhausted. Several times he tripped and staggered. The carcase on his back seemed to grow more heavy every moment, till at last he was forced to rest—not near the jungle—no ! He staggered out into the middle of a sun-scorched open space, laid the carcase on a hummock, and sat down with his back towards it.

Before him, standing round the open space, was a wall of kaing-grass, eight feet high ; behind him, the trees and creepers, densely matted. Everything was still and silent. The scorching sun beat straight down upon him, and the stifling air hung heavy. His chin sank to his knees and his eyes closed. He seemed to have abandoned himself to hopelessness, and almost fell asleep.

The air hung heavy and still—strangely still. Not a sound of bird or squirrel was there; even the insects had ceased to buzz; everything stood still as death, as if waiting for that which was going to happen. The uncanny silence seemed at length to rouse the senses of the jungle-man. Ba Saw opened his eyes and glanced uneasily around him, looking with apprehension towards the dark passage out of which he had come, then seeking to pierce the screen of grass in front.

Some subtle instinct seemed to rouse his fears. That indefinable sense which comes only from a lifelong converse with the jungle—the feeling of the air—seemed to put him on guard and string him to nervous watchfulness. It was something far more subtle than the sense of smell; but a chance scent might help him to read the message. He raised his head and questioned the air like an animal; then he closed his eyes and, with his neck craned forward, moved his face slowly along the grass beside him. If any jungle beast had passed by recently it would have left some trace—and the scent of boar or sambur is quite different to that of tiger.

He looked round upon the ground, searching for signs. His eye fixed on something: there! on that patch of short, dry grass. See! a blade



of grass was slowly turning upwards; and there, another was moving. All along a line, blades of grass were slowly moving, as if recovering after something had passed over them. Ba Saw stared in fascination. Those were not his footprints; he had not come that way. What was it, then?

Suddenly he jerked a startled glance at the wall of jungle on his left. "Click"—the short, light sound of a dry twig snapping. It might be the jungle swelling in the heat, but it sounded like a stealthy footstep. There, again —a short, sharp snap.

"Cheet, cheet"—flutter, flap. An owl flew out, perched on a branch for a moment, looked back, and then flapped blindly through the leaves. Something unusual must have startled it.

Look there!—the tall grass. It all stood motionless, except in one place where the tops were quivering, swaying slightly, leaning away from each other as if some Thing were slowly passing between the stems, deep down. Again there came a gentle crackling sound; then silence for a spell. Panthers move stealthily like that, and so do sambur. But it could not be either; for that was no sound of sambur's footsteps, and a panther would make a wider disturbance in the grass.

The silence was intense; every leaf was craning forward to listen. The Thing had stopped moving; perhaps it was looking out through that wall of grass. With a sudden, uncontrollable desire to find out what Thing it was, Ba Saw plucked a blade of grass. He would make the deer-call: if the Thing were really a sambur it would come out at the call. He hollowed his hands together with the blade of grass tightly stretched, edge upwards, along the hole between his thumbs. He put his lips to it, still keeping his eyes fixed on that place in the grass. His hand shook; he hestitated —in desperation he put his mouth to his hands again and blew hard and long.

A shrill, quavering squeal split the silence and wandered through the trees—a plaintive anguish-stricken wail, as of a lost, hopeless soul. His own foreboding and distress seemed to fill the note. It broke down with a sob, and died away with a groan. Ah, the blade of grass had split.

At the sound, the tall grass began to move again. There, too, in a fresh place on the right. And hark! somewhere back on the left there was a rustling sound behind the wall of jungle. On every side, things seemed to be moving, closing in upon the victim. A bough low down on the ground began to shake, and



the leaves shivered as if stirred by a sudden breath; but the other leaves were still; only that one bough was shaking. Something must be on it, hidden by the leaves.

The front of the wall of grass, down near the ground, stirred suddenly, then stopped still, as if something were peering through. The disturbances all ceased abruptly; everything stood still and held its breath. Then the grass slowly parted, and a fearful Thing came through. A head! No head of deer or wild boar; but something strange and inexpressibly evil—a small, black, featureless, pointed head with two gleaming, malicious beads of eyes. For a moment it peered out; then it slowly drew back, its malignant gaze never wavering for a moment. The grass ceased to move, and silence closed up round the crouching man.

"Orch"—a coughing groan close behind him!

He started round. Look! The carcase of the deer was slowly moving, as if an unseen Hand were drawing it away. It slipped off the hummock, and "Guch"—the sound came again (it was the gas escaping from its throat). The head fell back, the mouth opened, and the tongue lolled out.

The tongue!—uncut!

Ba Saw glanced back at the wall of grass;

all was still. Then he stared at the open mouth and tongue. Slowly, as if in obedience to some Will that was struggling with his own, he took the dā in hand. In spasmodic jerks, his left arm stretched out and his fingers gripped the tongue of the dead beast. The dā sliced off the end. The blood was thick, and would not flow. Blood They must have. From the wound on his leg he squeezed his own blood and smeared it over the severed piece of tongue; then he got up unsteadily, walked a few steps, laid the gory fragment on the ground, sank to his heels, and muttered through his fingers.

As if at the signal, all the movements began again. Then, one by one, the disturbances ceased; on the left hand first, then in front. But on the right the troubling of the grass-tops still continued; and look!—down on the ground, between the stems, Something was moving. It swelled in size, and seemed to be changing colour in quick flashes.

It was the body of a huge snake that was passing across the gap between the stems of grass: a python—or a hamadryad! Scale by scale, and spot by spot, it melted past. Slowly it decreased in size again, its body thinning down till, with a flip, the tail had vanished. It was gone.



Ba Saw walked to the carcase. His manner had changed. He seemed more at ease, and breathed deep, as if a great weight had been taken from him. He picked up his dā, wiped it, and tucked it in his clothing behind; then he lifted up the deer and, with a firm step, strode homewards.

"Some day I shall have the gun," he muttered to himself. (The Scripture Teacher had promised to lend him a gun.)

The gun—"Tha'nāt," the Death-Nāt: . . . with that to serve him, what other Nāts could be his master?

CHAPTER XX

THE HĀTANEE

Incantations have no saving power; but to abandon covetousness and lust, to give up all hatred and ill-will—that is the right sacrifice and the true worship.

Māya (the Evil One) is Self.

Gospel of Buddha.

ONE early morning Jackson was seated on the bamboo platform in front of his hut. The month of April was drawing to a close, and the hot season was at its height, but every day showed signs of the coming monsoon. Lately the sun had seemed to scorch with redoubled fury, as if he knew that his days were numbered; and last night a short, fierce wind-storm had romped through the village, bringing with it the smell of the long-expected rain, to which cattle and men raised their heads with dilated nostrils.

Jackson was engaged in cleaning his rifle, for he looked forward to some good sport to-day in "beating and burning" the jungle on the other side of the river. On the village side of the river the jungle was not worth



beating, for, owing to the presence of the missionary and a tiger, there was scarce a creature left alive ; those two "sportsmen" had exterminated everything, irrespective of sex or age. But across the river the sambur, hog-deer, barking-deer, panther, pig, and peacock throve in Buddhist security, and the tall kaing-grass was as dry as tinder ; so that, with a firebrand and a dozen beaters, one might expect a good day's sport. Jackson had made arrangements over-night for Ko Chee, and such of his gang as were ready to lay aside their Buddhist scruples and assist in the work of hunting, to assemble before daybreak this morning.

The sun burst up from behind the purple forest on the opposite bank of the river, and poured a flood of golden light across the waves of pale blue mist that rolled along the surface of the water ; but the beaters had not yet made an appearance. Mr. Squirrel, too, had vanished. Squirrel had been despatched to stir up Ko Chee and his dilatory Burmans, but he had been gone for more than half an hour, and had not returned.

After half an hour the rifle was clean enough to satisfy even Jackson. It was a "paradox" twelve-bore, with one barrel smooth and the other "invisible"-rifled—a handy weapon for

mixed shooting. Jackson squinted along the barrel, and seemed satisfied with the brightness of the interior. But the look on his face changed to astonishment. It was not "invisible" rifling that he saw; he was looking straight through the barrel at the main road of the village, and it was the invisibility of people that held his eye. In short, the village was deserted.

Jackson lowered his rifle and stared with both eyes. No man or child was to be seen, neither were the women filing down to the river to fill the water-pots, as was their wont. No sound could be heard—no voices; not even the crack of a twig for a morning fire, or the thump of a rice-pounder. Everything was silent—ominously quiet—uneasily still.

Suddenly a dog barked in a short, jerky, frightened manner; then a mob of buffaloes broke out from among the houses, wheeled in the centre of the road, and stood undecided, whilst the heavy dew-laden dust settled down again about their feet. They huddled together with heads in the air and nostrils dilated, as if seeking for the meaning of this infectious uneasiness. They ought to be out in the fields by now; but see!—the stockade-gate had not been opened. Why was that?

Pattering feet scampered underneath the



hut. "Kway," the yellow-dog, appeared, and scrambled up the bamboo ladder in nervous haste. He took cover behind Jackson's legs, and peered out from between them, his hair standing in a stiff ridge all down his neck and spine. Jackson stroked the animal's back, but the hair bristled up again as his hand passed over. The dog gave a short, stiff bark: he had seen a figure hurrying along the path towards the hut.

The hurrying figure was Squirrel himself. With a last glance behind him, the Burman climbed up the ladder and crouched down. His features worked nervously, and his throat gulped as if he were struggling with a fear that held him tongue-tied. Jackson's enquiry of "What's the matter?" almost sent the Burman into a fit.

"Where are all the people this morning?" Jackson asked instead.

Squirrel pointed to the village and made an inarticulate sound.

"What are they all doing?"

"Nothing," the Burman gasped, and threw out his hand with a gesture of hopelessness. "Can do nothing. It has come, and we shall die." His voice was hollow with despair.

Jackson looked down the deserted road of the village, but he could see nothing.

"What has come?" he asked.

Squirrel pointed to the village again, but offered no further explanation. He crept into the hut, and retired to a safe corner.

Jackson snatched up his hat, jumped down to the ground, and started off towards the village. But he stopped, and came back. He snatched up his rifle, but hesitated as he sorted out the cartridges. Was this a matter for shot, or ball? Slipping a "slug" cartridge into one barrel and "ball" in the other, he marched away into the village.

Most of the huts seemed to be deserted, but here and there the scared face of a woman appeared, and the muffled whimper of a child could be heard. Jackson slackened his pace, walking warily, with his gun at full cock. He looked from side to side as he passed down the road between the huts, but he had seen nothing as yet.

Suddenly a dark object sprang out from under one of the huts, and ran across the road: it was a little black child, that scuttled like a rat from one hut to another. That, and a dog with its tail between its legs, were the only signs of life. Jackson turned aside and picked his way among the huts. Here, also, reigned an awful silence.

He passed round the headman's hut and



came out at the back. Here he met with a sight that brought him to a halt with astonishment. A silent gathering of men were squatting on their heels in a circle on the dusty ground. Their attitude suggested that they were holding a consultation, but their gloomy silence seemed to indicate that they had gathered for the sake of companionship rather than discussion. When any one of them spoke his voice was low and hushed, as if he were afraid of being overhead.

Several of them looked round as the tread of European boots approached. "Thakin comes," one said, as if suggesting a new solution for the difficulty. "Ah, Thakin comes," several echoed with growing hope. "He! What can he do?" The spirits fell to zero again. It was evidently a matter beyond the help of man.

"What is it?" Jackson asked collectively.

Each looked at the other as if to say, "It's you he's speaking to."

"Here, you,"—Jackson picked his man, and aimed the question at him with a directness that allowed no escape—"what is all this trouble about?"

The man fastened upon writhed like a bug on a pin, waddled backwards, scratched his head, opened his mouth, shut it, stared at the

ground, picked up a stick and prodded the dust.

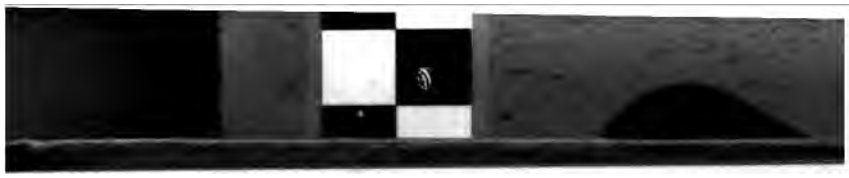
Jackson abandoned him. "Where's the headman?" he asked.

On the opposite side of the circle the crowd opened out so as to bring the headman into the direct line of fire. Thus disclosed, Old Tough Cocoa-nut put his hands together and "shekoed"; he was about to start upon an explanation, but his eyes fell on Jackson's feet, which had pushed their way through the crowd and stepped forward into the open space inside the circle.

A shudder passed through all the squatting figures: this piece of ground seemed to be tabooed. All eyes were fastened on Jackson's boots. See where they are treading—right over it! "Ah! he has stepped on it!"

"On what?" Jackson sprang back involuntarily. He stared at the ground. There were his own tracks—boot-marks, well defined among the pugs of naked feet; but what was it that he had trodden on?

His false step seemed to have broken the spell, for a buzz of talk broke out. Several men rose up and pointed to the ground in the centre of the circle. "See, Thakin—see the marks!" they said, with suppressed excitement. "No, no, not those; those are men's footsteps;



but look there!" The hand pointed to a strange footprint in the dust, and shrank back quickly, as if from something loathsome, horrible, and awful. The marks of toes and part of a foot, apparently.

"He has seen it! Ah, but does he understand?" The voices sank to silence, and all eyes stared at the Englishman, to see what he would do.

"Why, that's man-tracks, too," Jackson said, as he doubled down to examine the ground more closely. The marks were indistinct, and half obliterated by heavy spots of rain that had stirred the dust without wetting it. "Last night's tracks—a man's bare feet—running—no—walking on tiptoe." Jackson rapidly summarised his results for the benefit of all.

"A man's!" "He says they are men's footprints," the crowd murmured.

"They are only half man." A voice rose above the rest, with a startling result. Some sprang up and looked this way and that, as if fearing a sudden attack; others shuddered and crouched low with their hands on their heads. Was it the loud tone of voice, or was it the words that horrified them?

Jackson looked round, perplexed. "Are they not men's footprints?" he asked, in surprise.

Heads shook, throats gurgled, fingers pointed to the ground. "Look, there are more of them."

Jackson examined them more carefully. They looked human; there was no heel mark, it was true, but there would be none if the man had been going on tip-toe. But yet there was something about the footprints that seemed strange and unhuman. The ball-mark of the foot was rounded, not flat and irregular like a man's, and—yes—four toes only; all of equal size, too—no big toe. They looked more like tiger's pugs.

"Tiger's!" "He says they are tiger's." The muttering voices fell to a whisper.

"If not, what are they?" Jackson asked impatiently, annoyed at this idiotic performance. He looked round at the circle of brown faces, tangled heads of hair, and twitching muscular bodies.

"They are half tiger!" Again that voice, with its electric result. All started to their feet. The crowd broke up, scattered, and bounded away over bushes and fallen tree-trunks, straight for their homes.

Jackson stood and stared after them, uttering ejaculations. Then he turned away and examined the footprints, to try and gather from them the truth that the men apparently dared



not tell him. He followed the indistinct, half-obliterated marks as they wandered from house to house. Heads watched him from every hut with absorbing interest, as he mapped out the trail from side to side of the road.

He took off his boot and sock, and stood on tip-toe with his naked foot in the dust close beside those footprints. The mark of his own foot was totally different; the strange footprints were not human—not those of an ordinary man, at any rate. Were they tiger's? They resembled tiger's pugs in shape, but still there was something suggestive of a human foot: they turned out from one another, and the distance between them was more like the stride of a man than of a tiger. But what was that snake-like track that followed them?—a tail dragging in the dust! The thing must be a tiger.

The tracks came to an end at the stockade fence: the thing had climbed over. Yes, climbed over—not jumped—for the footprints continued right up to the stockade, and there became mixed. Half way up the fence a spike of the split bamboo was twisted as if it had been used as a foothold, and a piece of crushed weed was resting on it.

It had climbed the fence! A tiger would

have sprung on to or over the top, and would never have scrambled over in that almost human manner. It might be lame, perhaps; its feet may have been injured in a trap at some time or other; that might account for the peculiar shape of the footprints, too.

For a long time Jackson stood and stared at the puzzle on the ground. Then he seemed to have come to a decision of some sort, for he walked briskly back to his hut, and made a careful selection of ball-cartridges. He also unpicked the end of a slug-cartridge, and poured melted candle-grease into it, filling up the interstices between the slugs, and set it to cool. (A wedge of slugs, well waxed together, is more effective than an explosive bullet when the shooting is at close range.)



CHAPTER XXI

THE TIGER

In battle one needs a warrior; during meals a loved one; a wise man is an emergency.

Dharmaniti.

Lead others, not by violence, but by law and equity.

Gospel of Buddha.

MR. SQUIRREL had recovered from his alarm sufficiently to enable him to make tea and boil rice. He now stood scratching his back with a tin-opener, while with the other hand he held out a tin of kippered-herring, and silently suggested that the occasion warranted the opening of this new and extraordinary kind of provision.

"Listen to me," Jackson addressed him suddenly.

"Payā."

"I am going to follow those footprints into the jungle. You must come too, for when we have found the path by which the tiger comes we must prepare a place in a tree where we may sit and watch with the gun to-night."

Squirrel gasped with horror. "Payā, we shall both be killed!"

"By what?" Jackson fastened his eyes on the Burman.

"The Thing will kill us."

"Yes, yes; what is the thing?" Jackson asked irritably.

"Payā, I may not say." Squirrel glanced behind him nervously.

"It has gone away."

"But to-night it will return, Payā."

"Just so. We will wait for it."

"It will kill both of us," Squirrel repeated, in a manner that left no doubt as to the sincerity of his fears.

"You need not be afraid of tiger, when I hold the gun."

"It is no tiger," Squirrel hoarsely whispered. "Ah! Thakin does not know!"

"I am going to find out, and Mr. Squirrel is coming with me," Jackson said, with quiet determination.

The wretched Burman dropped on his heels and put his palms together.

"Thakin, do not go," he pleaded. "The gun is no use against the Thing."

But pleading was of no avail. Squirrel glanced behind him with a look of apprehension; then, in desperation, he took his fear by



the horns, and, crouching nearer, whispered in tremulous tones:

"The Thing is a Hātanee!"

He scarcely breathed the awful word, but the mere whisper sent him into a fit of trembling; then, in rapid sentences, he stammered:

"It is not a real tiger, but a woman—some woman who turns into a tiger at night, and goes to drink men's blood; for the—this thing has taken hold of her. Ah, I know what the Thakin will say: Why do we not bind the woman with ropes? But we do not know which woman it is; she herself does not know, for it is when she is sleeping that the Thing within her bids her rise up. Still sleeping, she goes out into the night quietly, on tip-toe, and as she walks her body turns into a tiger. Her footsteps change: at first they are woman's feet; then half woman, half tiger. She drops on all fours and becomes a full-grown tiger, mad with thirst for blood—human blood. She creeps from house to house till she finds one where a person sleeps alone, without companions. . . . In the morning she is once again a woman, and knows nothing of what took place; but in that house there lies the body of the man, with the tears of claws and teeth."

This extraordinary tale ended abruptly, for

Squirrel realised that he was speaking in loud tones. He glanced on all sides, and crouched down as if he anticipated some immediate and terrible consequence to follow his rashness.

Jackson picked up a cartridge and examined it with concentrated interest, as if it held the explanation of this strange affair. Then he pitched it aside: "Utter rubbish!" he muttered. But his brow was still furrowed, as if he felt that the matter could not be dismissed thus lightly. He took up the cartridge again, and turned it over and over, looking at the problem from all sides. What could it mean —this Hātanee, were-wolf, vampire?

Squirrel's confidence slowly returned. No disastrous results had attended his boldness. Perhaps he had not been heard. His manner became easier. He produced a piece of betel-nut, cut off a snip, and settled down to chew. He was content to sit for hours like this, while Thakin followed the tracks of thought through the jungle of the mind. Waddling on his heels to the front of the hut, he squirted a stream of red saliva on to the ground.

"Ho!" he said, "a man comes."

Jackson looked up and saw a Burman entering the village by the gateway of the stockade. The Burman hurried towards Jackson's hut; he seemed to bear important



news, for he stopped to speak to no one. He squatted on the ground in front of the hut and waited for permission to speak.

"Well, what is it?" Jackson asked.

"A tiger, Thakin."

"Where?" Jackson exclaimed, springing up.

"Homa." The Burman pointed across the fields to the distant jungle. "A bullock lies dead under a tree out there; it was killed last night. And the footplaces of the tiger——"

"Ah!"

"Are very large."

"But the shape? Were they like men's?"

The Burman looked surprised, He did not belong to this village, and evidently had not heard the news.

"They are the footplaces of a tiger—a large tiger," he repeated.

Jackson snatched up his rifle. "Come; bring a dā," he said to Squirrel. "As I said, it was a tiger that came into the village, and your talk is all nonsense."

Squirrel exchanged a few words with the other Burman, and apparently was assured that this was really nothing but a tiger, for he showed no hesitation in making ready to follow Jackson. The latter had jumped down out of the hut and walked to the gateway of the stockade, where he stood looking out across

the white-hot plains of stubble fields towards the distant jungle.

The news-bearer led the way across the fields. A few villagers joined the party from curiosity: "What does he do?" they asked of Squirrel. "He goes to shoot the tiger," Squirrel explained. "He says it was the same tiger that came into the village last night. He does not understand."

After a fatiguing tramp across the scorching, dusty fields, the party at last reached the trees and tall, dry grass of the jungle on the outskirts of the clearing. The guide dived into a narrow pathway that led through the grass, and the rest of the party fell into single file behind him. The talk had died down, and all were now stepping silently with careful jungle-tread.

The path that they were following was one of several that led into the jungle in the direction of Ba Saw's hut. Close on either hand the dense wall of dry grass rose up to a height of eight feet and more; here and there a tree stood gaunt and withered, and the dead leaves hanging from the twigs stirred in the hot, slowly moving air, and tapped loudly against each other; but all else was silent. Jackson slipped a couple of cartridges into his rifle.



The guide was proceeding cautiously: he examined every mark upon the ground. Now and again he stopped to listen, standing on one leg, with the other foot resting against the side of his knee. There were several sets of footprints in the path: a few cattle, the narrow hoof-marks of a deer; but no marks of men's bare feet, for this path was not frequented by the villagers.

The party had made their way some distance into the jungle when suddenly the guide stopped. He stepped back, muttering to himself; then he bent forward again and stared at the ground with horror. The other Burmans crowded up and looked at the place.

"The footprints!—the footprints!" they whispered in awestruck tones.

Jackson pushed his way in front of them and examined the ground. The marks were very indistinct, for the earth was hard and dry; but there could be no doubt about those footprints: they had the same peculiar-shaped toe-marks. It was the lame tiger, and no other! As he had said, this tiger was the one that came into the village last night.

He pointed triumphantly to this corroboration of his statement, and turned round. He was just in time to see the last of the Burmans disappearing in the direction of home. He

uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and hurried after them. Turning a corner, he tripped over a Burman crouching in the path.

It was Squirrel, shekoing in apology. "I stay with Thakin," he said. Many a braver man would, no doubt, have run away had he felt such terror as that which Squirrel was evidently suffering.

"Where is the guide?" Jackson asked.

"He has gone home with the others. But he said the bullock lies under a tree over that way."

"Come and show, then."

"Thakin, it is not good; we shall both be killed."

Squirrel made a last attempt at dissuasion, but, catching a look in Jackson's eye, he started forward along the path. The footprints checked him again; but, fighting with his fear, he stepped cautiously over the dreadful marks and proceeded with nervous care.

Here and there along the path, there were more of the footprints: the lame tiger must have been stalking the bullock before he made his kill. Jackson stopped now and again to examine the queer-shaped pugs. There was something uncanny about them; they were very indistinct, and showed only in places



where the dust had collected—here a toe-mark, there another—always strangely unlike the feet of any animal, even a tiger. Jackson may well have begun to doubt himself. These Burmans were silly children, but still—one could easily imagine that there were strange secrets in this jungle that these simple people knew of, but could not explain.

The footprints appeared at long intervals only, and there was nothing from which to judge of the length of the beast (if such it was) or of how it walked: whether all its feet were crippled, whether——

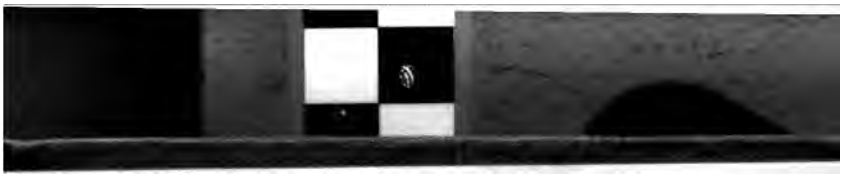
Squirrel stopped still, and pointed to the ground. Here was a long stretch of smooth dust, and on it the tracks were marked distinctly: one, two, three, four marks of feet, so clear and distinct that they almost seemed to speak. Here was the one with the twisted toe; next came the queer-shaped ball-mark; next—yes, a twisted toe again; and next—great heavens! the *second* foot! Two feet only—not four. What could—was the beast walking on its hind legs, or—or had the Thing only two? With a sickly expression, Jackson stood and wearily passed his hand over his forehead. Was it true, after all, and no mere superstition? Was he the ignorant fool—not they?

"There it is!" Squirrel exclaimed.

Jackson gripped his gun, expecting to see—he knew not what. But it was the dead bullock that Squirrel was pointing to. Half-hidden in the grass close to the foot of a tree, the carcase of the bullock was lying. It was gashed with claw-marks, and part of one leg had been eaten. There had been a tiger here after all!

With a determined effort to clutch at the common-sense view, Jackson pulled himself together and went forward. He was careful not to go near the carcase or touch it, for the scent of human hands would warn the tiger away. He made a detour till he reached the foot of the tree. The lowest branch was nine feet up, but, with the aid of Squirrel's shoulder, he succeeded in grasping it. He stuck in the fork of the tree, but the Burman assisted him from below with the muzzle of the gun against the seat of his breeches, and the knowledge that the weapon was loaded added the requisite impulse to Jackson's efforts.

It was a good enough place for the night's vigil: there were no branches in the way, and one could see down into the grass on all sides. A few twigs there were which might get in the way, and Jackson proceeded to sever



them quietly and hand them down to the Burman. When all was done to his satisfaction he tied a handkerchief to the bough, so that he could recognise the tree when he came again in the evening. Then he climbed down, and the two retraced their steps towards the village.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WOMAN

Though the banyan is a large tree, it grows from a very small seed. Examine the matter to the bottom.

Damathat.

JACKSON plodded wearily homewards across the sun-scorched fields. The heat was awful. The sweat poured from his chin and hands, while his pulses raced at fever-speed. One requires indeed an iron constitution, combined with obstinate persistence, to keep the body going in this frightful sunshine. Far away on the horizon, the trees and roof-tops of the village danced in the shaking heat; the distance was hardly a mile, but it seemed to be infinite.

After five minutes of tramping, he raised his eyes. The view had changed somehow: what was that cloud that was rising in the air between him and the village?—a cloud of dust? He stopped, and shaded his eyes. Squirrel also had noticed it; "They are men," he said; "many men coming this



way." His eyes were accustomed to the glare of sunlight.

By Jove, yes. One could see them now. The whole population of the village seemed to be swarming across the fields. They appeared excited, too—running and waving their arms; and the sunlight flashed on the blade of a dā—there again. Hark!—that is the murmur of their voices; dogs too, and women's shrill pipe. What could have brought them out at this time of day? And why were they bearing down upon Jackson? He stood and watched them as they came nearer.

"That man in front is Ko Chee, the head bachelor," said Squirrel. "The headman is not with them." This was significant of the lawlessness of their object. But what was their object? What on earth could have stirred them up to this pitch? Such violent and concerted action was most unusual for Burmans. Could it be some new development of this strange superstition? Had their fears goaded them to action? And what did they intend to do?

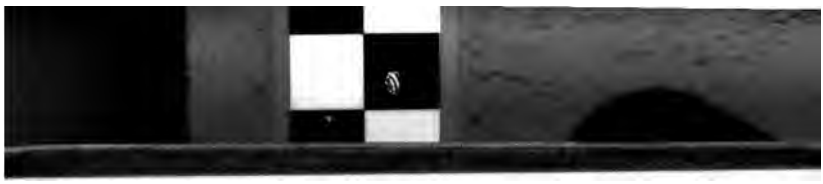
"There is the man who showed us the road to the dead bullock; and there are two others who followed us this morning." Squirrel picked out the familiar figures. "I think

they went back and told the village that we found the footprints in the jungle." What then? Did that account for this strange excitement? And why were they making straight for Jackson? Could it be that his presumptuous interference with the Hātanee-creature had filled them with apprehension for the safety of the village, and had they come to use violence upon him in the hopes of appeasing the Thing? Jackson planted his feet wide, rested the barrel of his gun on his left arm, and stood to wait their oncoming.

The mob were armed as if for a boar-hunt—dās, hog-spears, and bamboos shod with iron. They had ceased shouting now, and came steadily on with an angry, determined manner, such that even the dogs that accompanied them gave them a wide berth. The women had been left far behind, but were calling shrilly after them: "Yih-wee-yoh!"—they seemed to be urging the men on.

Jackson braced himself up to meet the shock; but, when they were almost upon him, the crowd parted in the middle, as a stream is divided by a rock; they passed on either side of him and joined up again behind, leaving him standing half-choked by the cloud of dust that followed.

He swung round, expecting an attack from



behind. But they had gone on. What on earth was their object? They were heading straight for the part of the jungle where the dead bullock was. By Jove, this would never do; it would upset all the plans if that crowd went blundering through the jungle near where the carcase was lying—it would scare the tiger away for good and all. "Stop them!" Jackson shouted. He ran after them, regardless of the heat and dust.

The rearmost of the crowd slackened pace and called to the others. Some said "Stop," some still held on. Ko Chee, the leader, turned to those behind him: "What is the matter?" "The Thakin calls to stop." "Thoo. What matter what the Thakin says —He! We cannot stop for him." It was evident that they had cast off all authority and order. "He says there is a tiger in the jungle over yonder." "Ah, that's true—a tiger; we have no quarrel with such things." "Come, we will go round this way." Ko Chee pointed towards the jungle on the right-hand side. The crowd swerved round and followed him, leaving Jackson standing.

He had diverted them. So far, so good. But where were they going? He called after them and caught the answer: "To the house of Ba Saw."

"What in the world for?" he turned to ask of Squirrel.

"I cannot say, Payā," Squirrel answered.

Jackson had had quite enough of running in this overpowering heat, but it would be as well to see the matter through; there was murder in those men's faces, and, maybe, they needed the help of European common-sense. Besides that, there was no doubt that this affair was connected in some way with the Hātanee-creature. He started after them again.

The crowd had melted into the jungle, leaving a cloud of dust filtering through the tall grass. Jackson came up breathless, and dived into the narrow pathway. There was no doubt of the line they had taken, but they had gone so fast that he failed to overtake them before the path began to bend round in the direction of Ba Saw's hut. The crowd were there now; their angry shouts could be heard like the roaring of a sea.

As Jackson emerged into the clearing, a strange sight met his eyes. Around the hut, like a pack of dogs round a treed cat, the excited crowd surged, gesticulated, shouted, and shook their dās and spears; and in the open front of the hut, at the top of the ladder, stood the burly figure of Ba Saw, dā in hand. He was using the back of the blade—it was



a heavy and deadly weapon, even thus—now to right, now to left, he struck at the fingers that clutched the floor-beam and at the heads that came up the ladder.

And hark to the shouts of the mob! "The woman! the woman! Stand back, Ba Saw, we have no quarrel with you; but the woman we must have. Bring out the woman. Pwā Cho the pagoda-slave! Pwā Cho is the Thing that walks by night!"

"Aye, we will deal with the woman so that she cannot walk by night," a voice rose above the rest. "Let us cut off her feet—her tiger's feet!"

Ba Saw's dā came down with a crack, and a man fell off the ladder—then another. "Heh, sons of dogs—get down," he grunted fiercely. He was beginning to use the edge of the blade, and the crowd shrank back. "What new madness is this?" he shouted.

"The woman—Pwā Cho is the Thing that walks by night!" they yelled. "She came into the village last night, and this morning we found the footsteps in the path that leads to this hut."

"Aye. The footprints led to this hut," the stentorian voice rose above the rest. Ba Saw glanced in the direction of the voice, and caught sight of his old-time enemy.

"'Tis you again, Ko Chee!" he shouted back. "So you are the dog's son that heads this pack. Can you not let old hatreds rest? Come on yourself, then; come up and fight." He slapped his arm with the old, familiar gesture.

The crowd took up the shout: "Let Ko Chee come forward—let Ko Chee fight! He brought us here. It is he who wants to fight—not we."

Ko Chee looked round at his followers; his reputation was at stake, and there was nothing for it but to make a show of fighting. Holding his dā in his teeth, he girded up his loins.

Just then, the crowd caught sight of a figure moving at the back of the hut. They burst into a yell: "There she is—there's the woman." A hog-spear went hurtling in at the open front, then a shower of stones, and a dā whirling through the air.

"Cut the house down!" They set to work to chop the posts that supported the hut, but this was too slow. "Burn it; bring grass and wood." Some had already dragged a pile of brush-wood under the house, and others ran for more.

In desperation, Ba Saw leapt down among them, striking to right and left. A gash opened on one man's shoulder, the next parried the dā-stroke as it descended on his



head. The two weapons clashed; one of the blades circled in the air and fell to the ground. With the empty handle Ba Saw struck, guarded, and hammered fiercely.

"Hold him—hold him!" The crowd rushed in upon him and pulled him down, seething over him like dogs on a wounded boar. With his great strength he hurled them off: twice—thrice he rose and shook himself free.

But see! The others have swarmed into the hut, and are dragging something out towards the front—something that struggled weakly.

At last Jackson saw the object and intention of the mob. He charged through the crowd, hurling aside this man, striking that with his fist, using the gun-barrel to a third, till he reached the ladder and swung himself up. He sprang among the men who were holding Pwā Cho. Two of them he seized by the throats and hurled from the hut to the ground; the others gave way before his onslaught, released the woman, and scrambled out of the hut. Jackson leapt down amongst them and belaboured them with fists, feet, gun-stock—anything that came handy. The crowd broke before him and shrank into huddling groups. "Go!—Thwa!" The short, sharp imperatives fell upon them like the lash of a whip, and did more than blows could do, for the tone of his

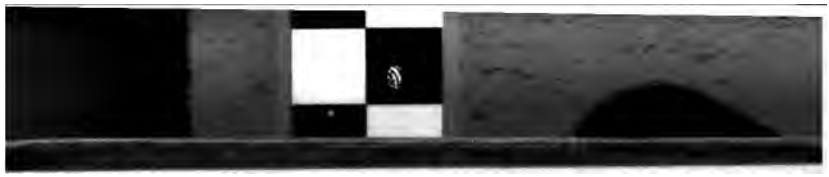
voice was that of a man who has authority, who does not doubt that he will be obeyed, who has reason, justice, right as well as might, to back him up. "Unhand that man!" They fell away from Ba Saw and retreated.

Instantly Ba Saw sprang up; in two strides he was among them. Unarmed, he forced a passage through the crowd and made his way towards Ko Chee, who stood fingering his dā uneasily.

The two rivals faced each other. For some seconds their eyes battled with glances of challenge, defiance, and feigned contempt. "We meet again," Ba Saw said quietly; "let it be for the last time."

Ko Chee aimed a swinging blow with his dā; Ba Saw leapt back and avoided it. In a flash he had wrenched a hog-spear from the hands of one of the bystanders, and threw it up to parry the next fierce cut. The dā clove the bamboo shaft in two, but the long iron spike at the spear-head and a foot of handle still remained in Ba Saw's grasp. Each stepped back and took the measure of the other. Then, with bodies half bent forward, they circled slowly round each other, eyes fixed on eyes.

The crowd fell back, shouting, "They fight!—they fight! Now we shall see which is the better man."



Ko Chee stamped on the ground and made a feint. With a sneer, Ba Saw stood his ground; then suddenly he lunged forward. Ko Chee struck the spear-head aside and leapt back; but with thrust after thrust the spear pressed the attack. Clash after clash, the dā parried each quick thrust with never a pause in which to take the offensive. Step by step, Ko Chee was driven back, and a look of hopelessness came over his face. "To me, loo-byo," he called to his followers, "strike him, spear him!"

The mob sprang forward to assist their leader, rushing at Ba Saw with dās and spears. In another moment Ba Saw would have been overwhelmed; but, at this critical juncture, a voice cried out—

"The Hātanee!"

The effect was astounding. Never once, even in the wildest moments of the riot, had the crowd dared to utter that name—those dreadful syllables. The words struck them like a lightning-flash. They stood petrified in their attitudes, some bending forward, some with dās uplifted, some with spears poised for the throw. Their very expressions were frozen on their faces: the mouths remained open as if shouting, but the words were stopped in the throats, and the roar of voices had ceased abruptly, as if cut off with a knife. Then,

slowly, their looks and attitudes melted with terror, and their eyes turned towards the man who had uttered that dreadful word. He stood pointing towards the hut, pointing to something on the ground—

The woman!

Pwā Cho was hobbling towards them on all fours, or rather, on three legs, for in one hand she held a dā.

She had seen Ba Saw hard pressed, fighting with a broken spear-head against the army of weapons. In an agony of mind, regardless of danger, forgetful of everything save that her man was in dire straits, she had started to come to his assistance and bring him his dā. She had stumbled and fallen. Struggling to rise, and still striving forward, she hobbled three steps on all fours.

The crowd had shown no fear of the woman—no fear of the Hātanee when in woman's form. But now the woman was changing to the tiger! She was coming towards them on all fours.

THE HĀTANEE!

For a breathless moment they stared, with eyes bulging from their heads. Then a panic seized them. They turned and fled. Fighting past each other, tripping, falling over one another, they plunged into the jungle, like a stampeding herd of cattle.



CHAPTER XXIII

UP A TREE

If anything is to be done let a man do it; let him attack it vigorously.

Gospel of Buddha.

JACKSON was utterly exhausted when he returned to the village at midday, for the morning's strenuous exertion in the fearful heat had been enough to overcome the strongest of men. For some hours afterwards he had been lying in his hut, while the faithful Squirrel ministered to him, cooling his forehead with a wet cloth. The sun was now more than half way down towards the horizon, and Jackson rose up wearily; the few hours of rest had in no way renewed his energies; but there was more work to be done, for this business must be seen through to the end. He came out of the hut and looked across the fields towards the south-western horizon, which could be seen through a gap in the distant jungle. There would be a storm to-night. An ominous bank of solid, lumpy cloud was

boiling up like the smoke from a mighty explosion.

It was now only four o'clock. Perhaps it was rather too early to be getting to the scene of to-night's vigil; but there was that storm coming. Jackson turned back into the hut, and set to work to clean his rifle. The foresight had been damaged in the scuffle this morning, but what matter? The shooting would be at close quarters to-night, and in the dark. He packed a dozen cartridges carefully into his pocket, filled the water-bottle, and stuffed a few biscuits and other food into the cartridge-bag. "You must come with me," he said to Squirrel; "I must have a man to help me into that tree."

The villagers collected at the stockade gate to see the two pass out. Their looks were not hostile now; they seemed, if anything, a trifle ashamed of this morning's performance, and of the truly un-Buddhist behaviour to which their fears and Ko Chee had urged them. But they had come together out of curiosity; they were interested to see what this strange European would be doing next. "He goes to shoot the tiger in the footprint jungle. He is mad. He will be killed, for sure."

Jackson set forth on his Quixotic mission with none of that enthusiasm which would



have accompanied such an enterprise if there had been a companion to share his plans. He cared little for the opinion of these poor ignorant villagers, but the feeling that the sympathy of all the world was turned from him seemed to depress him and fill him with uneasiness and doubt. It was not the danger, but the risk of failure that filled him with anxiety. If the enterprise proved unsuccessful, or, worse still, if some accident were to happen to himself, the convictions of the villagers in the reality of their superstition would be the more firmly established. Nevertheless, he strode forward resolutely.

The sun still scorched with unremitting fury, and the plains were hot and dusty; but there was no doubt that a storm was brewing. Now and again a low, muttering sound rumbled through the silence—as of a savage beast in pain, lying deep in the jungle—and the air was full of strange sighs and shivers. Sudden gusts of cold, wet wind would spring out from nowhere and draw their clammy fingers across the burning skin; and at unexpected places fierce local whirlwinds would fall from the brazen sky.

It was one of these strange phenomena that riveted Jackson's attention. Some distance in front of him a weird ghost-like form sprang

up from the ground—a spiral column of dust. Twisting, bending from side to side, it reared its head as high as a tree, and silently stalked across the open space towards the jungle. The panting air seemed all to hold its breath, waiting and expectant, and the trees of the jungle stood still, as if fascinated by the dreadful sight, whilst the gaunt, writhing spectre advanced towards them nearer and nearer. Then, all too late, when the awful thing was almost upon them, the trees in its path seemed to realise their danger. With trembling leaves and stirring branches they thrust aside their neighbours, looking this way and that for a way of escape. But, alas! their feet were rooted to the ground, and next moment they were throwing up their arms to ward off the onslaught of the furious whirlwind that sprang upon them, scattering torn limbs and leaves in all directions.

"Payā, payā."

Jackson turned sharply. Squirrel had sunk to his heels with his palms together in an attitude of supplication.

"Come," said Jackson irritably, "cut one of those bamboos" (pointing to a tall clump near by); "we shall need a ladder."

Squirrel applied a dā to the root of one of the strongest of the bamboos, dragged the



severed stem from the tangle of branches, and lopped off the top and all the twigs, leaving the spikes projecting a few inches. Shouldering this improvised ladder, he gloomily followed his master. The boldness which he had displayed before the villagers had now completely evaporated, and he shied at every little circumstance in which he read an evil portent. The chatter of an owl brought him to a final halt. The inauspicious bird was seated on a dead tree near by.

"Thakin, we must go back," the Burman said doggedly.

"Nonsense. You are not afraid of an owl. See!" Jackson waved his arms. But the bird sat tight, and chattered again. This was too much for Squirrel; he turned homewards. "Stop!" Jackson said, as he kicked up a lump of earth. The missile rattled in the tree, and the ill-omened bird silently flew off. But Squirrel was in no way reassured; it was not the bird's presence so much as its message that filled him with alarm.

To Jackson, however, the bird conveyed a different message. It was early for an owl to be about—a reminder that the night was setting in unusually fast. The sun had already sunk behind the ominous bank of clouds that surged up from the back of the jungle.

Jackson quickened his steps, for in the gathering darkness the tiger would be earlier at the kill.

Squirrel jogged along silently till they reached the tall grass and the narrow pathway where those footprints had been found this morning. Here he made a sound to call Jackson's attention, and by signs begged him to stop. He unrolled a corner of his lonjee and produced a little bundle of cooked rice.

Jackson made a gesture of annoyance: this confounded business of propitiating the Nāts! "Come along, come along," he whispered impatiently: for there was no time to waste, and he had no stomach for this mummery to-night—it was all part and parcel of these foolish superstitions. "Come."

Squirrel complied, but with evident misgivings, for one could ill afford to shirk these duties when engaged on such an enterprise, and on a night like this, too, when all the darkling jungle was alive with evil spirits.

The two proceeded silently along the narrow path, stopping now and then to listen. The grass seemed full of sounds—sighs and shivers caused by the air moving restlessly before the coming storm. They were now close to the place where the carcase of the bullock lay hidden. Darkness was falling rapidly, and



it was possible that the tiger had already returned; it would be at least unwise to walk straight upon him. Jackson decided to reconnoitre, and signalled to Squirrel to help him into a tree close by. He reached the lowest branch in absolute silence, but the position was not high enough for him to see the whereabouts of the carcase, and he climbed carefully to another bough. From here he could see the tree with the handkerchief on the bough, and the place where the bullock lay; but there was no sign of the tiger. He waited for some minutes to see if there were any motion in the grass around. Then he climbed down.

He found himself alone. Squirrel had disappeared. The cartridge-bag lay on the ground, but the Burman had gone.

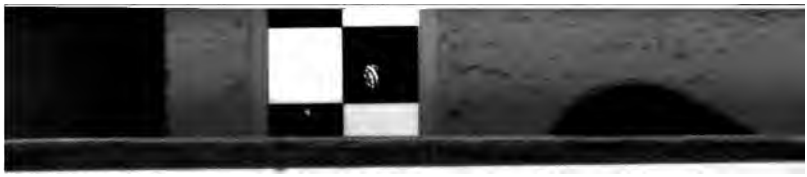
"Good thing, too," Jackson muttered, to reassure himself; "his silly nonsense was beginning to get on my nerves." But, in spite of himself, his fingers shook as he fastened the cartridge-bag over his shoulder. The silence, perhaps, had also got on his nerves. He lifted up the bamboo ladder and tucked it under his arm; then, putting his rifle at full cock, he silently and carefully picked his way in the direction of the carcase, listening with all his ears; for the tiger might

be close at hand—might even now be stalking him with equal silent stealth.

Something rustled in the grass behind him! He swung round: what was it? There; it was behind him again. He turned quickly and saw the cause this time: it was the end of the bamboo that had dragged in the grass. That was the simple explanation of the rustling behind him.

But the incident had thrown him off his balance. Tired out and overwrought, his nerves suddenly gave way. He burst into a perspiration as he stood listening intently. He glanced quickly from side to side, and faced round suddenly at the sound of a slight click behind the grass. He dropped the bamboo and gripped the rifle with both hands, pointing it quickly here and there—the grass seemed to have grown alive with clicks and cracks.

With a drowning effort, he struggled to regain the mastery over himself. He clenched his teeth and forced himself to take a step forward along the path. Instantly, he sprang back. He had trodden on one of those dreadful footprints of the human tiger. Here were those four marks of feet that had told such a strange tale this morning—four footprints, but the prints of two feet only! Jackson stood and stared at the ground. He



lowered the barrel of his rifle till it rested on his foot, and with his hand he slowly rubbed his forehead. Was it true, and no mere superstition? He had felt the same doubt this morning, but had cast the suggestion aside. That, however, was in broad daylight —and strange things had happened since. And now—what was the meaning of it all? Was the thing really a tiger?

"Ha! ha!"—a short, dry laugh burst from his throat; then, "Confound the fellow," he muttered; "his nonsense has got on my nerves." He stooped and picked up the bamboo, and then strode resolutely forward.

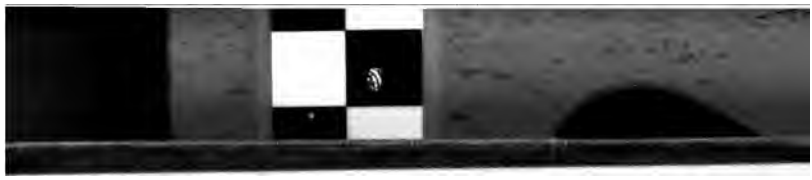
He redoubled his caution as he approached the tree by the carcase. At length he reached the spot. It was comforting to see that handkerchief on the bough, for there was something reassuring in the feeling that he had been here in the morning. The carcase lay in the same position, untouched: the tiger had not yet returned; but it was dark by now, and the sooner one was in the tree the better.

The task of getting up the tree had presented difficulties this morning, and it was a problem how to climb the thick trunk now, without assistance. Jackson passed the band of the cartridge-bag through the trigger-guard of his rifle and slung both around his neck.

Then he placed the bamboo quietly against the trunk of the tree: it wobbled insecurely; but, reaching round the tree as far as he could with both arms, he set one foot on the lowest spike of the bamboo. It turned round suddenly, and his foot slipped to the ground. He looked about him for an inspiration; but there was no other way of reaching the branch. Passing his arms round the tree, he pressed the bamboo against the trunk with his chest, and braced himself for the effort.

With a spring, he was clinging half up the trunk while his feet fumbled for a foothold. With another frantic effort he flung his arm over the bough and struggled into the fork, where he lay for a minute, panting with the exertion. There was no need to climb any higher, for he could get a clear view from here of all that could be seen, namely, the dim outline of the carcase and the ground near by: the darkness hid the rest. He removed the band of the cartridge-bag that had almost choked him, and examined his leg, which was bleeding copiously from a gash where a spike of the bamboo had pierced it.

His attention was called by the sound of something rustling in the grass below. He listened and looked intently, but could hear no more, and see nothing. It must have been



the wind. Yes, there it was again, on all sides. A gust of cold air blew through the tree, reeking with moisture and the scent of rain. The storm was coming. The low, moaning sound in the distance increased moment by moment, and grew to a roar.

The storm rushed over the tree-tops. A blinding flash of lightning lit up all the waving jungle for an instant; then the rain burst in drenching volumes through the leaves and drove in spray beneath the tossing branches. Jackson climbed to better shelter higher up, and huddled close to the trunk. His one object was to keep dry: the tiger would not be likely to come now, and besides, it was impossible to see or hear anything through the storm.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE "THING" ITSELF

The world is dark; a few only can see here.
Dharmapada.

"I WAS afraid," Squirrel kept repeating to himself as he groped his way into Jackson's deserted hut, "I was afraid." He seemed to be preparing a defence for his conduct in anticipation of a stormy interview with Thakin to-morrow—if, indeed, there were to be any "to-morrow" for either of them. He was afraid, and therefore he left Thakin in the jungle and ran home. Surely that was a most natural course for a reasonable man to take; yet there was a note of uncertainty in his voice, as if he foresaw that some further excuse would probably be demanded. Thakin had not run away; but then, Thakin was not afraid, and therefore there was no need for him to run away. From Squirrel's point of view, fear was on a par with any other natural bodily or mental feeling. He, poor man, had never been taught that fear is a disgrace, and



consequently he had no fear-of-showing-fear to lend him courage.

He groped his way towards a corner of the room, where he found a match-box, and lit the oil-wick. It was "rice-time," and he was hungry; but the fire-place was on the ground outside, and who would dare to venture forth to-night? Besides that, the storm would break in less than "the boiling of a pot of rice." Even now the stars were being eaten up by the black jaws of cloud, and fierce gusts of wind sprang into the dark trees overhead and scrambled from branch to branch. Squirrel had to content himself with cold boiled rice left over from the morning's meal.

A hurricane of wind galloped past in the darkness, and the storm burst upon the hut with a deluge of rain that drove in at the open front, and squirted through the matting of the wall. Squirrel, huddled up in the corner, no doubt hugged himself for having run away home as he did, for who would be out in the jungle on a night like this? Perhaps, even, one might hope that the fearful Hātanee would not walk abroad to-night.

A creature jumped into the hut with a sudden thump that made Squirrel start to his feet. It was only Kway, the yellow-dog, wagging a wet tail, and grunting with satis-

faction at having found shelter. To a most casual glance it was obvious that Kway had been dining out; nevertheless, the normal parts of his body seemed to wish to convey the impression of a much-to-be-pitied dog, in desperate straits of hunger. With a wag of apology, he searched into one cooking-pot after another. Squirrel scraped together a little food to give the dog, for it was well to have a companion to-night; but Kway had other engagements. He sat down for a few minutes, just for politeness' sake, then, despite the rain, he hurried off to make another call—for dogs seemed in great request to-night.

The fury of the storm was but short-lived. The rain soon ceased, and the wind died away to a rumbling in the distance. Then the gentle, new-born night opened her eyes with twinkling stars, and a calm, cool stillness settled down, with fragrant air, to heal the wounds of nature. All the creatures of the night awoke. A swarm of insects filled the air with a steadily increasing whirr-burr, and from every pool of rain-water the muddy, bubbling voices of the frogs joined the chant of thanksgiving at the welcome change of weather.

During the long months of the hot weather, in unknown retreats the frogs had hidden



away, and now, at the first burst of rain, they came out croaking in unfeigned delight. Up to the necks in muddy pools, some sat and gurgled, "Here's a puddle, here's a puddle," with complacent satisfaction, while noisier members swelled the chorus with an "Ahra, ahra," like a stone rolling round inside a jug. Down at the roots of the luscious damp weeds little frogs kept repeating, "Wet, wet, wet," with unctuous india-rubbery persistence, and the deep bass voice of the bull-frog cut through the hubbub with his raucous, bactrian bark. The cool air was heavy-laden with soothing rest for tired bodies and anxious minds; and Squirrel fell asleep. The smoky lamp struggled against the swarm of self-immolating insects until, at last, with a final flare, the flame died away among the corpses of the vanquished.

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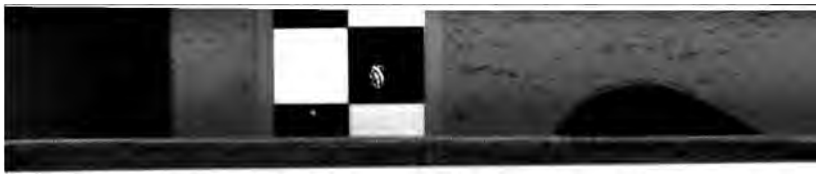
Squirrel woke up, shivering with the chill of night and itching with mosquito-bites. He scratched himself plaintively, and put out a hand to feel for a blanket; but a sudden fear struck him motionless. He was alone! and it was night—the dreadful night when the fearful Thing was roaming. Suppose it were to come upon him now!

A slight rustling sound caught his ear. It came from above—something stirring in the

thatch. It might be only a lizard, but more likely it was Ain-Soung, the House-Nāt, moving from his hiding-place. It sounded now as if he were creeping along the rafters. Squirrel began to mutter, "Payā, payā. Remain at home and guard the house to-night." He rose up, and felt his way to the corner where Ain-Soung's water-pot was hanging. It was dry. He groped his way to the other water-jar, and returned with a ladleful—if there were fresh water here, Ain-Soung would not need to go out and drink. The creaking in the rafters ceased. Squirrel retired into the darkness at the back of the room and wrapped himself up. For a long time he sat and listened to the croaking of the frogs, till by degrees the steady, monotonous sound, twining round and round in his brain, bound his mind in sleep.

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All of a sudden, his senses rushed back upon him. Something unusual in the air had wakened him—the frogs!—the croaking of the frogs had ceased. Why? Perhaps they had heard a footstep (for at the slightest trembling of the ground the frogs will cease to croak). A giant-cricket burst into a shrill, whistling buzz, but stopped suddenly. There must be some animal moving about outside.



Would that one had the eyes and ears of insects and frogs!

The room was all in darkness save where the dim light of the star-lit night marked out the square of the open front, and indistinctly hinted at the shapes of things within, and—but see that! The outline of the open front seemed to have changed in shape; a dark lump broke the straight line of the edge of the platform outside. Now it had vanished. After a few moments it reappeared again—a dark object, rising slowly above the level of the platform! What was it? An animal, or a man? It had no definite shape, but two points stuck up at the top of its black outline, and suggested that the thing had ears.

It stopped still, as if listening, and one by one the frogs began to croak. All at once they stopped, for the creature was moving again. See! was that an arm, or a front paw? It was climbing in! Slowly, and with stealthy caution, it raised itself up. A bamboo creaked. The creature stopped; and its body! —its body half-turned towards the faint light—was yellow in colour; and all down its side and back were stripes! Were they shadows, or tiger stripes? And its head!—those points were ears; but its neck, slowly moving from side to side, was short and thick and stiff,

unlike that of any animal—hideously malformed. It was climbing in. It drew its hind-legs slowly up. What was that snake-like thing crawling after it? A tail, dragging limply on behind!

The creature gathered its limbs in a formless heap, and then began to move quietly across the room with an unnatural, awkward gait, till it reached Jackson's empty bed, lying on the floor with the mosquito-curtain dimly suspended over it. The awful creature stopped and craned its neck forward, then slowly raised a paw and touched the mosquito-curtain. It seemed to draw back, as if the feeling of the curtain, or the scent, had told it that this was a European's bed. Perhaps the Thing preyed on Burmans only; or had it found that the bed was empty, and therefore useless? By the movement of the black outline of its head and ears it seemed to be looking round and staring into the dark corner of the room. It began to move again—which way? Turning slowly on its haunches, it retraced its steps across the floor. It crept silently on to the platform outside. The dark shape of its uncouth body stayed motionless for several seconds, while the strange creature stopped to listen; then, limb by limb, it cautiously climbed down to the ground outside.



It was gone!

"Peet, peet"—a frog broke the silence. Others joined in, and soon the whole chorus were croaking lustily again.

Squirrel gradually realised that he was alive. He had seen the fearful Hātanee, and he still lived!

CHAPTER XXV

A VIGIL

Loo-la, Chā-la (Are we men or are we tigers?)
Burmese Boat-song.

JACKSON sat and shivered in the tree. The rain had soaked his clothes all down one side; one leg tweaked with cramp, and his teeth tried to start chattering with the cold, or the shaking of incipient fever. The storm had passed away; the sodden air hung heavy and still. The clouds thinned and melted; here and there patches of stars shone out, and a pale, diffused light crept over the sky—the light from the rising moon. The formless mass of jungle gradually took shape with irregular outline, black against the pale light of the sky, and down below, the sea of grass appeared to congeal into clumps and patches, the hollows in between filled with the heavy mist that hung low over the ground.

Leaves and branches all stood still, but the night was full of sound. The dew and rain



dripped heavily from the leaves in the black jungle close at hand. The swelling earth hissed and bubbled as it drank in the moisture, and a solitary frog wound up his machinery: "Currk, currk"—stiff and rusty after months of disuse. By degrees another sound forced itself into notice. It seemed to rise from the ground on all sides; a gentle, singing sound, which minute by minute increased in volume till it filled the air with a high-pitched shriek. It was the chorus of the invisible hosts of mosquitoes that were rising from the malarial moisture. They had already found out the man in the tree. He shifted his position and tenderly scratched his leg, then brushed his face, then sought the seat of his breeches. He looked about for a better position, but decided that it would be best not to move: the slightest sound might be fatal, for now was the time for the tiger. It was a good enough place where he was, and he would have a clear view of the carcase when the moon rose higher. At present the moon was still behind the jungle, and down below all was black in shadow, save where the lumps of mist grew and melted in ghostly form.

Swish—crick. A new sound broke through the humming of the mosquitoes, a rustling in the jungle close by—something moving and

stopping at intervals. With startling abruptness a hoarse bark rang out; once again, and a third time, in quick succession. A deer, over there in the darkness; it now stood quite still, as if listening. Suddenly it burst out through the grass and crashed into the jungle further off. But hark!—there it was, back again; unless that was another animal moving slowly through the grass. The tall, withered stems rattled gently, as if something were slowly pushing its way through. It must be down there, in that patch. Look!—the shadows in the hollow seemed to thicken. No, there was nothing there; or it had gone again.

The moon rose between the tree-tops, and shone a cold white light in flickering patches here and there over the tops of the clumps of grass, making the shadowy hollows grow darker still. In the changing light it seemed as if the grass were moving round in patches. Look at that clump: one could almost believe it to be slowly detaching itself and gliding across the hollow. Surely it *was* moving!

Jackson gripped his rifle. It was a striped back that he had seen creeping stealthily along—the tiger! "Steady, steady," the voice of prudence urged. "Don't fire yet; wait for a clear shot." The shadowy form slunk into a patch of tall grass; the stems



rattled gently; then all was still. The silence seemed intense, for Jackson had forgotten all sounds save that for which he strained his ears —the sound of the movement in the grass. The blood hammered through his head, and his heart shook his body with heavy throbs.

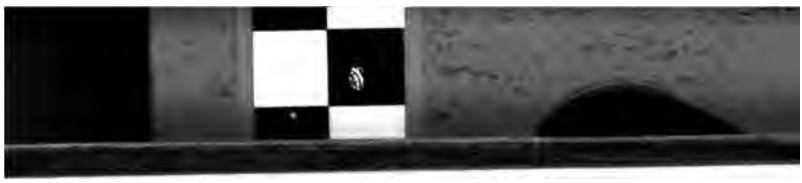
He waited long, and his heart-beats died down to normal, but nothing had stirred in the grass. The tiger had vanished. But Jackson still held his rifle ready. He would not miss the next opportunity; if the beast appeared again he would fire at sight, and risk the shot.

The moon rose high, and flooded all the open space with light as clear as day. Each stem of grass could be seen distinctly. Jackson looked along his rifle: it was strange how hard it was to see the sights when everything else was so plain. He pointed the rifle here and there, taking aim. One ought to be able to hit a mosquito anywhere on the ground. Look at that lump of earth there: suppose that were a tiger, one could draw a bead steadily on him. Could one, though? Where was that foresight gone?

By-and-by he grew tired of this, and became conscious of the mosquitoes again. He held the rifle in one hand while the other hand swept over his face, then the wrist, then down

the leg, then back to the face; as fast as they were swept from one place the vicious pests gathered on another. It was a good thing there were no red-ants in the tree. Yes, it was a good thing. . . .

He had fallen asleep.



CHAPTER XXVI

A TRAGEDY

Self is small and brittle, and its contents will soon be spilt.
[E. A.]

THE moon sailed overhead and paled in the west as another light grew in the east—a tall shaft of faint white light pointing upwards among the trees. Filmy and indistinct of outline, the eye would not notice it save when roaming the horizon. It was the "finger of the dawn," the sun's corona.

In the thicket a jungle-fowl began to crow. Some distance off another answered; then a third joined in. Jackson woke up suddenly, wondering where he was. The tree?—the rifle? Ah, yes; it was a good thing he had not dropped the rifle. And the tiger? Confound it!—but no; the carcase of the bullock had not been touched; the tiger had not returned. Perhaps it had scented the man in the tree: in that case it would have gone away for good. Besides, the day was

breaking, and it was too late to expect the beast now. This was a deep disappointment. However, there was just a chance that the tiger might be lurking near, and it was still too dark to see the way home conveniently; so Jackson decided to wait a little longer. He was about to reach up and take down his bag of food, when his ear caught a sound—the snap of a twig.

There was something moving—over there, near the path—down in the pathway itself.

A dark object passed by a gap in the grass and disappeared behind the next clump. It looked like a man's head and shoulders. Yes, there! It was a Burman; a woodcutter, perhaps. It was early for any man to be about, and it seemed as if the Burman did not know of the danger in this direction. Jackson was about to signal a warning to him when his attention was called to something else.

Another dark object passed by that gap in the grass—just a glimpse of something moving; then it passed behind the grass. It was something that seemed to be following quietly along the path a little distance behind the man; but that brief view in the dim light had disclosed nothing of the shape of the creature, though it did not seem like a man.



It crossed the next gap. There! it was a brown striped back, that crouched along as if it were stalking the man. The tiger! No time for warning the man. Shoot when the beast shows up again—now.

The report of the rifle split the air. A coughing groan told that the shot had struck home; but the smoke blotted out the scene.

Would the smoke never lift? Jackson waited ready for a second shot, but nothing broke out either to right or to left. The beast lay hidden by that pall of smoke; it was not dead, for it was lashing at the grass and moaning; it must be badly wounded.

But look at the Burman! He had stood as if dazed or terror-stricken by the shock of the sudden explosion; but now he turned and ran back along the path. Great heavens! Could he not see the tiger, then?

Quick as the thought Jackson swung himself from the tree to the ground, grasped his rifle, and burst through the grass towards the spot, regardless of the danger of facing a wounded tiger. The Burman had stopped. Jackson pushed past him, and approached the spot from which came the sound of the groaning.

But what a sight met his eyes! Indistinctly

in the darkness he saw the striped body writhing on the ground. He raised the rifle to his shoulder, but let it fall again, and strove to pierce the gloom. What sort of creature was it? Its hide was striped, but surely it was not a tiger; and one shot could not have caused all that weird deformity. Its hide was torn off and flapped loose in places; each of its limbs seemed to be shattered. What was it?

The formless muddle drew together into a groaning heap; then rose upon its hind-legs and, looming immense in the misty darkness, staggered forward, straight towards Jackson. Its skin flapped about its legs, and its boneless fore-limbs seemed to hang loosely from the shoulders. The head swayed from side to side as if the neck were broken, and from somewhere in the middle of its throat the breath groaned and hissed in sudden bursts, as if the windpipe were severed.

Jackson stood petrified with astonishment; he seemed to have forgotten the use of his rifle, and stood helpless as the Thing advanced upon him. It rushed savagely at him. He raised his arm. A blinding flash of fire scorched his face. He staggered back and fell. The Thing seemed to have struck him a stunning blow on the side of the head, and



his arm was paralysed. In his last moments of flickering consciousness he saw the awful creature coming at him again.

But the Burman! The Burman, who had stood as if robbed of all power of motion, now rushed forward, brandishing a dā. He ran right at the Hātanee! Was he mad, or blind with fear? He wrestled with the creature and pushed it back, saying fiercely: "That is my Thakin; you shall not kill him." The creature thrust him aside. The dā rose threateningly in the air; but the weird monster caught the Burman's hand with one paw and grappled with him, its breath hissing fiercely.

They broke apart. There was another flash, and a sharp crack. The Burman staggered back, but recovered himself and rushed at the Thing again, striking downwards at its head. The creature raised a limb to ward off the blow, but the dā crashed down, severing the paw in mid-air and burying itself at the side of the neck. The two figures locked together, swayed, stamped forward and back, grunted, hissed, then broke apart. Both fell to the ground.

The strange, tiger-like creature twisted in a heap on the ground; then it gathered itself together, rose up, and with a stumbling gait



charged blindly through the grass. The Burman, too, had struggled to his feet: with a harsh cough, he rushed after the retreating figure, his dā uplifted.

The grass closed upon them both and unconsciousness upon Jackson.



CHAPTER XXVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

So the world is afflicted with death and decay; but the wise do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world.

In whatever manner people think a thing will come to pass, it is often different when it happens, and great is the disappointment; see, such are the terms of the world.

He who seeks peace, should draw out the arrow of lamentation, complaint and grief.

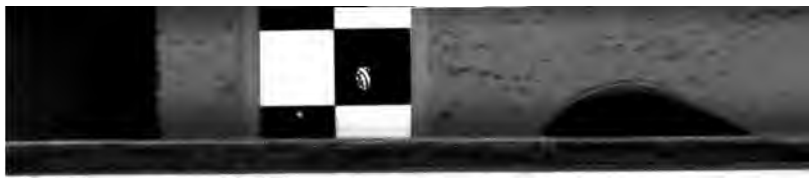
Gospel of Buddha.

THE fierce sun struck down upon the occupants of a canoe that was creeping along the river, hugging the shore for the sake of the scant shade of the emaciated jungle that straggled thirstily down to the water's edge. The four Burmans raised and dipped their paddles with clockwork regularity. Even they seemed overpowered with the steamy heat, for they paddled in silence. Perhaps, also, a certain feeling of awe was responsible for their solemnity, for in the middle of the canoe an European sat and swore appallingly as the sweat poured down his face and dripped from his short-clipped black moustache.

"The village at last!" he ejaculated, when the ruined pagoda of Tanbin came into view. As the canoe sidled into the bank, the European undoubled his tall body, almost upsetting the frail craft as he leapt out in impatience to get under cover of a tree or hut.

In answer to his enquiries, the villagers pointed towards the hut where Jackson had lived all these months; but none made mention of the misfortune that had befallen the "Thakin" yesterday, for it was to be assumed that the white stranger knew of the tragic events that had taken place—otherwise, why had he come to the village? "He is the doctor," some said; "or the 'Great-Preserver-of-Criminal-Law,'" others suggested; and all were agreed that he must be either the one or the other, for, like vultures that spy out a carcase from afar, the doctors and police are the first to appear on the scene when a man meets with injury or sudden death.

As a matter of fact, the stranger was neither the doctor nor the D.S.P. He was none other than Wood, and it was by a pure accident that he had arrived at this critical juncture. He strode in the direction indicated by the villagers with, evidently, no suspicion of the fate that had overtaken his friend. "Hullo, Jackson!" he cried cheerfully, to announce his arrival, "I



thought I'd surprise you." The Burmans silently made way for him as he climbed into the hut.

"Is the Thakin not here?" he asked. They pointed to the bed on the floor in the corner, where Jackson lay, stretched out. His head was heavily bandaged with old cloths, and his left arm seemed to end in a blood-stained mop of rags. Wood knelt down beside the bed: "What has happened, old chap? Do you know me? I'm Wood." Jackson seemed to recognise his friend, for his eyelids flickered and his uninjured right hand raised itself a little.

"What has happened to him?" Wood asked of the Burmans who were crowding round.

The headman waddled forward: "We found him in the fields this morning," he said. "We thought he was dead; but he woke a little coming home."

"But how did he come like this?"

"He was bitten in the head. Two fingers also are eaten right away."

"By what?"

The headman did not answer, and the crowd exchanged significant looks.

Wood touched the bandaged hand. "Let me have a look at it, old chap." He unwrapped the rags and disclosed a gruesome sight. A piece of rope was tightly twisted

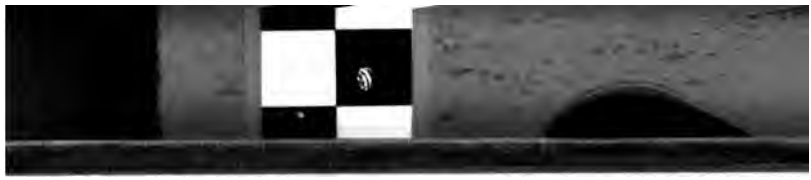
round the forearm as a ligature, and the remains of the hand were black and swollen. The third and fourth fingers were gone, and the distorted flesh had shrunk back from the protruding bones.

What was to be done? The steamer would not come till to-morrow—two days before he could be got down to Rangoon. If that ligature were left on, mortification would set in. "Go!"—Wood jerked the peremptory word at the crowd. They shuffled out silently. "Here, you" (to Squirrel), "bring needle and cotton, cloths and clean water—and a razor."

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The operation took an hour to perform. When it was over, Wood adjourned to the shade of a peepul-tree outside and summoned the headman to come before him and relate the circumstances by which Jackson had met with his injuries. But to a man of "ordinary" common-sense, the headman's tale was utterly incomprehensible.

"I don't understand," Wood said impatiently. The tone of his voice caused the headman to sink still lower on his heels, bring his two hands together in front of his face, and continue his narrative in a sing-song tone between his fingers. "Oh, that's enough," Wood cut him short. "There is no sense in



your words. First you say that a tiger came and ate or drank up half the village, and that the Thakin went out to shoot it, and then you say it was not a tiger at all. Now, remember, you will have to make a clear report when the 'Great-Preserver-of-Criminal-Law' comes along; and the Government does not look favourably on headmen who allow dacoits to come and kill Thakins, and to steal property, besides. Whose property was it that was stolen?"

"Payā, it was my own property. Last night my box was broken open, and many rupees and ruby ear-studs were stolen."

"Well, you had better come with me into the jungle and find out where the dacoits have gone."

"Your Highness commands," the headman replied resignedly. Then, putting his hands together again, he said, "Will your lordship grant my prayer?"

"What is it?—be quick."

"Payā! Yesterday there was a great disturbance in this village. The people made riot; for their fears had driven them mad, and Ko Chee stirred them up. The Government will say that the headman was at fault. But your lordship has the ear of the Great-Preserver-of-Criminal-Law; will your lordship say a word to him, that the headman, Old Tough Cocoa-nut, and the other respectable men in the village,

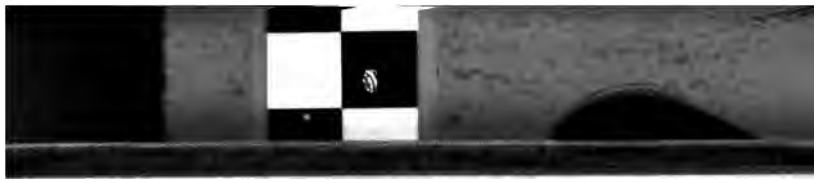
had no hand in the rioting? The headman tried hard to check the young men, for what they intended to do was against the law, and contrary to the dharma. They were mad; and it was Ko Chee, the loo-byo-goung, who led them. Payā-ā!"

Wood stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Was the Thakin injured in the riot?"

"No. The Thakin came back to the village after the disturbance was over; but in the evening he went out into the 'taw,' taking his gun. This morning we found him in the fields, nearly dead; he had crawled back into the fields, but could not get home."

"Well, make a clear report about everything to-morrow. But now, go and call two other men to follow with me into the jungle."

The headman "shekoed," and crouched away in a humble attitude, doubled up as if with a great pain inside him (for this Englishman, whoever he might be, was certainly a man to be feared). Wood took a look at his patient. Jackson was asleep, but delirious with fever. Nothing further could be done for him, however, and, leaving Squirrel in charge, Wood shouldered a rifle and started off towards the jungle, determined to find some clue to all this mystery. The headman and two other Burmans accompanied him.



CHAPTER XXVIII

DISCOVERIES

Cut down the whole forest of lust; not a tree only.
Danger comes out of the forest.
Cut out the love of self, like an autumn lotus.

Dharmapada.

THE pathway through the grass was still muddy with last night's rain, and on the soft ground were the marks of footprints, evidently fresh this morning. A pair of naked feet had picked their way along towards the jungle, and here and there were the pugs of tiger, sometimes in between the other footprints, sometimes overlaid upon them. The tiger had been following the man all along the path; but the beast must have been some distance behind, or else moving very stealthily, for the man seemed to have been wholly unconscious of his danger. His footsteps showed no sign of haste. Here he had stepped wide to avoid a pool of water, and there was a long stride; but he was not running—it was a heel-toe mark; he had not even stopped or

turned. The tiger's pugs were spaced at distances which were certainly unnatural for a tiger. Sometimes they followed on the man's footsteps for several paces, as if to take advantage of his choice of firm ground; sometimes they seemed to wish for silence, and were lost in the short grass along the side of the path. Wood stopped now and again to examine the tiger's pugs; he had evidently noticed their peculiar shape.

The whole party came to a halt at a place where the grass was trampled down and the footprints were mixed up. By the side of the pathway was a dark patch—a large pool of blood had dried in the sun, blackened, cracked, and curled up in flakes: a stream of ants were busily dragging some of the smaller flakes across the path. The Burmans gathered together, talking rapidly: "It was here that the Thing had set upon Jackson Thakin." They glanced round nervously at the jungle. But to Wood the signs seemed to indicate that the tiger had overtaken "Barefoot": what had been the fate of the unfortunate man? Wood searched round for further signs, parting the grass with his rifle. His foot trod on something. He stepped back and made a grim discovery.

A hand, severed at the wrist!—a white



man's hand, gripping a revolver. Red ants swarmed round and over the ghastly, silent relic; they had eaten away the flesh in many parts, but there could be no doubt that it was a white man's hand.

Wood rapped the horrid thing to drive away the ants; and then, taking the revolver by the end of the barrel, he lifted it up. The hand rose with it, as if the vanished man still held on to his cherished weapon. Then the fingers slowly relaxed and slipped. The hand fell with a thud, and the ants rushed upon it fiercely.

The headman picked it up. "Jackson Thakin has lost two fingers only—not the whole hand," he said; "and see, this was struck off with a dā." He pointed to the cleanly severed wrist-bones.

Wood examined the revolver—a Colt's. Two cartridges had been fired: he extracted the empty cases. "Does this belong to Jackson Thakin?"

"No; and that is not Thakin's hand," the headman repeated. "Thakin has lost two fingers; let us seek for them." The Burmans began poking about in the grass. One of them stooped to pick up something—Jackson's rifle. Another had discovered the carcase of the bullock near the foot of the tree. Wood went over to the tree and inspected it. Thus

far the headman's tale seemed to be borne out by the facts: a tiger had been here and Jackson had sat up for it; there was the bamboo by which he had climbed up the tree. But this threw no light on the fresh mystery of the hand.

One of the Burmans made a new discovery —a bundle of heavy things wrapped up in a cloth. He untied the knots, and spread out the contents: money—some two hundred rupees, perhaps, and jewellery—gold bracelets and ruby ear-studs.

The headman examined each article separately. "They belong to my wife," he said; "and the money—it is the full sum that was taken last night."

Wood looked from the stolen property to the human relic on the ground. Was that the hand that took them? The mystery thickened. "Where does this pathway lead to?" he asked.

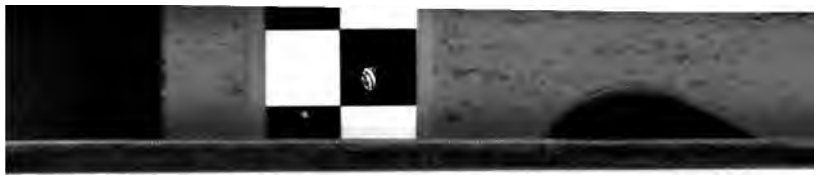
"To Ba Saw's hut."

"Who is Ba Saw?"

"He was formerly of Tanbin village, but now lives with his wife in the jungle over that way."

"Are those his footprints, think you?"

"Maybe." The headman bent down to examine the human footprints again. "They are those of a heavy man."



The other two Burmans began talking excitedly: "They must be the feet of Ba Saw, for see" (pointing to one of the Hātanee footprints), "she was returning with him."

Wood had gone further along the path; but there were no more footprints. The actors in this mysterious tragedy seemed to have vanished into the air. He came back, but could find no further clue. "Come," he said, "we will go and find this man, Ba Saw; he will tell us what he has seen." He pressed forward along the path, scanning the ground attentively. The Burmans followed reluctantly; they seemed ill at ease, and glanced nervously from side to side at the high walls of grass.

The party had proceeded some distance in silence, when one of the Burmans stopped and held up his hand. Hark! There was a sound—a guttural, cackling sound, close by, behind the tall grass. There it was again!—an uncouth, gurgling noise.

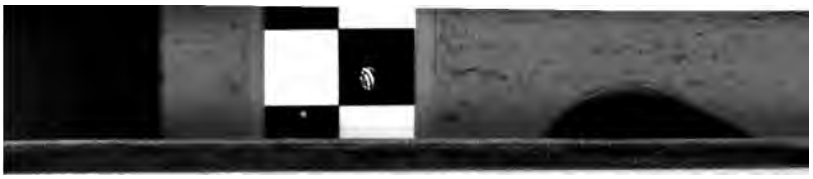
"Huh!" one of the Burmans ejaculated, as if bitten by a sudden inspiration. He picked up a clod of earth, and pitched it over the tops of the tall grass. The missile fell with a crash, and the cackling sound ceased. Another lump of earth went sailing in the same direction, and, with a loud commotion, a huge bird rose

from the grass. It flapped into the air, and, spreading its great wings, sailed to a dead tree, where it settled heavily, and sat with its ugly, featherless neck craning from side to side. It was a vulture!

Wood pushed his way through the grass towards the place, and came upon a gruesome scene. In a narrow glade another vulture was standing on the ground with wings outspread; the gaunt, indecent creature turned its head to stare at the intruders, but seemed too gorged to fly. A little further off a third vulture was tearing at something on the ground—the carcase of a tiger, judging by the skin. The great bird stood with one claw on the dead body, drove his beak down viciously, strained with neck, back, and legs, ripped up a flapping strip of flesh, and tugged it from a limb.

But the shape of that limb! It was a man's arm. Wood's rifle rang out, and the bird fell flapping on the ground; the other vulture rose, in an ungainly manner, and flew off.

The corpse was evidently that of a man—a white man, too. It was an awful sight: the eyes were picked out and the jaw torn away, but part of a black beard remained. "This is his hand." One of the Burmans held up in the air the severed hand that he had been carrying



by one finger. He laid it at the end of the arm to which it evidently belonged.

Wood stared at the ghastly spectacle. Here, then, was one of the victims of the struggle in the footpath. But what was the meaning of this queer get-up that the dead man was wearing? The skin of a full-grown tiger was fastened round his body. The tiger's head formed a kind of helmet, and the man's face protruded from an opening half way down the tiger's neck. He was singularly shod, too: on each foot was a curious kind of slipper. Wood removed one of them with some repugnance, but examined it with interest; it was a tiger's hind-foot, with a thong of leather to strap it on.

The Burmans huddled together and retreated, staring with eyes of alarm. "It is the Thing-that-walks-by-night," they whispered hoarsely.

Wood held out the slipper towards one of them. "Here, your feet are bare; put this on, and show what sort of mark it makes when one walks with it." The man drew back with horror, and would not touch the awful thing.

The headman, however, seemed reassured. "It was a man," he said; "nothing but a man. It was not really the Thing." He took the shoe, put it on his own foot, and trod with it on the ground. The mark it left was identical



with the print of the hind-foot of the creature that had come along the pathway—a tiger's hind-foot in shape, though the sole and toes were somewhat shrunk and distorted. Wood seemed satisfied with the explanation—the tiger's pugs and the severed hand belonged to this dead man. But who was the man?

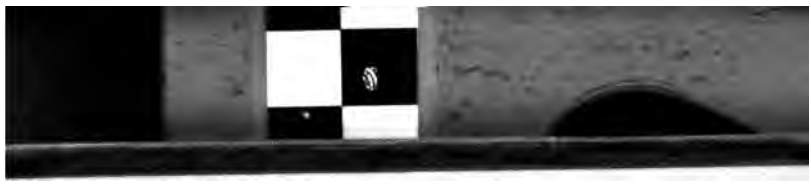
"It is the Scripture Teacher from the Karen village." The headman seemed to recognise him by the beard. No one else wore a beard.

"Who?" said Wood incredulously. "The missionary? It can't be." But the headman was certain of it, and the other Burmans concurred.

A missionary!—wandering about the jungle at night, dressed up in a tiger's hide?—fighting with a revolver against a man armed with a dā? And who was the other man?—the man whose bare feet had also passed along the path?

"Come," said Wood, "cover up the body. We will return later on." They lifted up the mangled body and laid it under a tree, covering it with branches, to protect it from the vultures; then they returned to the pathway, and started off again in the direction of Ba Saw's hut.

Before they had gone far the headman stopped and pointed to a footprint. "Barefoot" had entered the path again. His foot-



prints wandered from side to side. He had been staggering along, and must be wounded badly. Look here!—he had fallen; there was a patch of blood. Here was the mark of a hand and a knee; he had risen again, and struggled on. Here again he had fallen, and lain for a long time, for the blood-stain was broad.

But look! Other bare feet—smaller feet—had come from the opposite direction and met "Barefoot," and helped him to rise. Further along the path both pairs were going together, the little ones deeper in the ground than before, as if they were now bearing part of the weight of the other.

Here again was another trampled patch. "Barefoot" had rested a long time, while "Littlefoot" went forward alone, and afterwards returned. There, in the grass, was an empty jar: "Littlefoot" had brought water, and stanched the wound, too, for there was less blood. The headman picked up a strip of coloured cloth: it was part of a woman's tamein. "Littlefoot" had torn up her clothes to make a bandage.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAST SPURT

Buddha said:
The evils of the body are—killing, theft, and adultery;
The evils of the tongue are—lying, slander, abuse, and idle talk;
The evils of the mind are—covetousness, hatred, and error.
I teach you to avoid the ten evils.

"THAT is Ba Saw's house," the headman said, as the party emerged into the clearing. The headman displayed no anxiety to proceed any further; he squatted down on his heels, and the other two Burmans followed suit. Wood went forward alone.

On the ground by the hut the footprints told of desperate efforts: how that Littlefoot had again and again struggled to get the wounded man up the ladder. Wood glanced round, and then looked up at the dark opening of the hut. All was silent. He looked at the ground again, and made sure that the footprints ended here; then, putting his rifle at half cock, he rested the weapon in the crook



of his left arm and warily put one foot on the lowest rung of the ladder. He grasped the ladder high up with his right hand and waited a moment, looking upwards. Should he climb up quietly and look round, or make a dash and surprise the man ?

He reached up with his hand a little higher, and gathered himself for a spring, when, from the hut above, there issued a voice—a woman's voice, singing a plaintive dirge.

It was a song of a heart-broken anguish, a trembling lament that poured forth a flood of woeful appeal. The clear little notes ran hither and thither up and down the scale like the feet of some small wild animal that is caught in a cage, with faltering steps seeking high and low for a hope of escape, running up to the top in an agony of distress, hanging with a quiver of pitiful helplessness, only to fall back again to the depths of despair.

" Oh ! Payā, payā ! " The voice of a stricken soul that called upon a God ; a throb of despair conjoined with a quaver of half-caught hope, as of one who is taught that there is no God to answer the prayer, but who clutches at a frail hope that Something will listen—that some justice, compassion, or mercy will grant relief from this unbearable affliction. Surely, surely, that voice of trembling sorrow, those

piteous arms of entreaty, will draw down the ear of that Power, however far removed from human suffering.

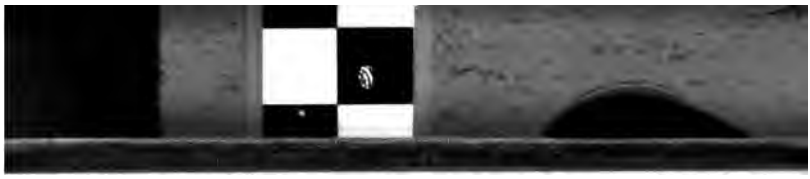
And, intermingled with those tones of ineffable sadness, floated a note of question half hushed with resignation, a faint cry of longing to know the reason—Why, and oh! why, had this been ordained?—sinking softly to a sigh of uncomplaining submission.

Wood, with his hand upon the ladder, stood spellbound. His eyes fell slowly to the ground, and his strong-nerved body shook till the ladder quivered in his grasp. The voice died away. He raised his head; then slowly he mounted the ladder and entered the hut. Stepping softly over the floor, he stood in the centre of the room, in silence.

Pwā Cho seemed to be unaware of his presence. She was seated on the floor with her back towards him, and, with one arm resting on the pillow, she bent low over the head of the man who lay on the bed.

Ba Saw opened his eyes. "It is a Thakin," he whispered huskily. "I thought, may be, Ko Chee had come to finish it."

Strips of cloth were bound tightly round his body. His breath came with difficulty and rattled in his throat, while red bubbles oozed from the corner of his mouth as fast



as they were wiped away by Pwā Cho's gentle fingers.

Wood was in doubt; compassion bade him forbear from intruding. But, on the other hand, this man held the key to the whole mystery, and there was no time to be lost, for Wood had another patient (at the village) who called for his attention. He propped his rifle against the wall, took off his sola-topee, sat down, and produced a note-book. He addressed Pwā Cho quietly and with sympathy. "How did it happen?"

Pwā Cho made no answer, and seemed not to have heard.

After a while Wood said, "He is shot through the body, is he not? Why did Jackson Thakin shoot him?"

This indirect, but deliberate, perversion of the truth had the effect of rousing Ba Saw to life. He opened his eyes with a look of indignation, resenting that this deed should be laid at the door of "his" Thakin. "It was the Scripture Teacher who shot me, with six-barrel," he said, with an effort.

"Was he the man in the tiger-skin?"

"The same. I killed him," Ba Saw said, simply. "He was going to kill the Thakin, but I stood in front. Then he shot me with the six-barrel, and so I killed him."

"And why was the Scripture Teacher wearing that tiger-skin?"

Baw Saw closed his eyes and made no reply.

Wood also remained silent, as if he were unwilling to pursue this distasteful enquiry any further. He took stock of the dying man, and saw that there was nothing that he could do to help him. He reached out for his sola-topee, and was about to rise up, when Ba Saw opened his eyes and said: "I will tell everything, for he was a worthless man, though a Scripture Teacher, so-called. When he is next born he will suffer for his evil deeds, but the truth cannot harm him now.

"Listen, Thakin." Ba Saw spoke with difficulty. "Some months ago that Scripture Teacher came to the village in the big jungle. He said he had come to teach the new dharma. There were many that listened to him. They brought him all their wealth, for he said that was the only way to 'Nibbana.'" Ba Saw paused for breath and to gather his fast failing strength. Then he continued:

"Two days ago the Scripture Teacher came to this house. He wished that I should tell him all about the village of Tanbin—tell which was the headman's house, and how much wealth the people were possessed of. And he unfolded a plan. He would put on a



tiger-skin, and creep through the village by night, so that the people would be smitten with fear of the Thing, and be unable to defend their houses; then he would take their money. . . .

"It was an evil wish. I would not go with him; he went alone. . . .

"Then, yesterday, the people came here, and sought to kill my wife. The Thakin drove them away; but I was still angry with them, and when the Scripture Teacher came again that night I agreed to follow, for I wished to see a great fear put upon the village. . . .

"He took much money—I know not how much, nor whence—and together we were returning. . . . The Thakin's gun spoke from the tree—and the rest I have told. . . ."

Ba Saw's strength had given out. His eyes closed, his breathing grew harsh, and the blood trickled faster between his teeth. But he spoke again. "I did wrong—and already I suffer for it. Thus Buddha said: 'Passion destroys the angry man, as fire burns its own stick.' 'There is no consuming fire like passion—no losing throw like hatred.'"

There was silence for some time. Then Pwā Cho began whispering to herself: "Water; he wants water," she repeated; but

she was loth to leave her man. Wood snatched up the empty water-pot, swung himself out of the hut, and ran to the stream.

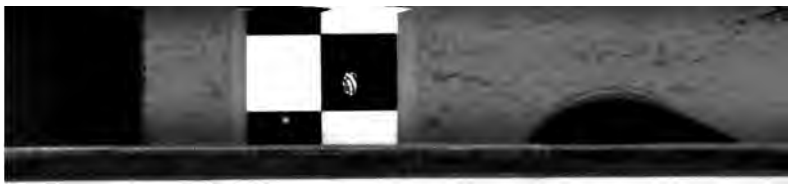
When he returned he found the dying man in his last moments. Ba Saw was muttering: "I take refuge in the Buddha" (the death-bed formula). After that his mind began to wander. He spoke disjointedly—of deer, and footprints of deer.

"The dā! the dā!" he suddenly exclaimed; "the handle must be firmly fastened."

Then he grew easier, and remained silent for some time. Presently, with his eyes still closed, he put out his hand, and seemed to be groping for something. "What is it?" Pwā Cho asked him, and bent down to catch the answer. But no answer came. The hand still groped, as if seeking for something.

"What is it you want? Tell me what you want!" Pwā Cho cried, with feverish anxiety. "What does he want? Oh! I cannot tell what he wants!" Her voice broke down with distress. She sprang up, seized one thing after another, and held each of them to the dying man; but his hand merely touched them and pushed them aside. She gave him the dā; his fingers closed on the handle for a moment, but released it again—it was not that.

"Oh! what does he want?" the girl cried



piteously, as she rushed to Wood and clung to his arm beseechingly. "Tell me what it is that he wants."

Wood glanced hurriedly round the room, seized the water-dipper, and held it to the dying man. No, he did not want water. What was it then? Try this—or that ——

Ah! the canoe-paddle—the favourite canoe-paddle! Though Ba Saw's eyes were closed, his hand knew the touch of his old friend. He grasped it near the blade with his right hand, while his left hand slid up the handle till it reached the end. He gripped it firmly with both hands, and the muscles of his forearms played in waves as his fingers settled down on the handle. Then his mind seemed to have started off on some old familiar track, and he muttered thickly. His head began moving with little jerks, and his strong arms twitched, as if keeping time.

He was paddling.

The jerks grew faster and increased in energy till they shook his whole body. He struggled into a sitting posture and, with violent spasms, dug with his paddle. The breath burst from his blood-filled mouth.

"Loo-la, chā-la! chā! chā! chā ——"

He fell back. His hands dropped down, and his eyes opened with a look of joy and triumph. He had won the race!

CHAPTER XXX

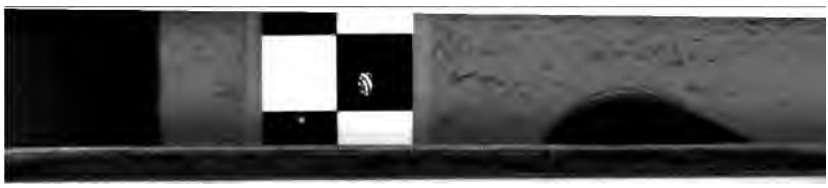
CONCLUSION

The sugar-cane has a better taste knot after knot from the tip; a good friend is like this.

Dharmaniti.

"YES, thank you. It is all to my liking, Mrs. de Souza. I'm just itching and crawling with satisfaction from the roots of my hair to the tips of my toes."

"Ah, now. It really is nice to hear you say that" (Mrs. de Souza's whole body crinkled with her smile). "As I said"—she continued the summary of her lengthy discourse—"as I said to the nurse: 'Mr. Jackson will like to have his old room again, and, being so weak as he is with his illness, he will find it convenient to be on the ground floor, with no stairs to go up; though, of course, I could let him have one of the upper rooms if he wished, for the 'Zayat' is not over full at this time of year—travellers don't come to Rangoon during the rains; and I'm sure it's a good thing they don't, for they would never come



back, would they? Shall I shut that jilmil for you?"—she pointed with her foot to a venetian, low down in the wall near the floor, through which the rain was squirting in.

The venetian, however, proved as difficult to shut up as the good lady herself. Lifting her skirts, she poked her toe at something soft that was jammed in the lower rung—"Go out, will you!"

It wouldn't. It squirmed in, and hopped towards her. With a skilful side-kick, Mrs. de Souza jerked the fat toad into the centre of the room, where it fell with a flop, and slithered along the floor like a burst rubber-ball. It shammed dead for a moment, then sat up and opened one eye just in time to see the hostile foot advancing upon it again. With a hop and shuffle it took refuge under the wardrobe.

"There now!" Mrs. de Souza exclaimed with vexation, "I can never get them out from under there—those horrid toads!"

"Never mind," said Jackson; "let him be. He's another old friend of mine."

Mrs. de Souza fairly looped her smile back over her ears. "Then I'll leave you to talk to him," she said, as she departed in a rattling commotion of the curtain-rings over the doorway.

Jackson sighed—with relief, perhaps—for he could now lie back in the long-chair and light a cheroot—an operation that required two hands, and therefore possible only in privacy, when the left hand could come forth from the seclusion of his coat pocket, where it lurked to hide its deformities from the inquisitive gaze of strangers. There were two fingers and a thumb on it: quite enough to hold a cheroot or strike a match: efficient, though lacking in beauty. Three months in hospital had reduced his frame to knobbly bone and stringy sinew, for fever and blood-poisoning are demons more terrible far than any Hātanee.

A rattling of the curtain-rings made the hand dive back to its pocket. Jackson looked round: "Oh, it's you, Squirrel."

Moung Shin, the faithful Squirrel, was bearing a tray. He silently marched through the room, deposited the tea-things on a table outside in the verandah, and placed a chair alongside. "It is good for Thakin to sit and look at the jungle," he explained, in a manner that left no room for dispute.

"Does Squirrel wish to go back to the jungle?"

"Town is good in the rains. There is not much mud, and it is easy to make a fire. But people are many and noisy; the air is thick,



and there is no voice of deer in the morning. No, I do not like the town very much; but I wait till Thakin goes back."

Jackson made no answer, but relapsed into silence, thought, and the chair. Squirrel discreetly retired.

The rain had mercifully ceased for a time, and birds and beasts came forth from their shelters to shake themselves. In the branches of the tree overhead, a gang of rowdy crows sat cawing and jawing to each other while they looked around for some object upon which to perpetrate their infamous practical jokes. With hoarse croaks they bandied rude jests at the expense of the man below. With head on one side and beady eye peering between the leaves, they kept a watch on the tea-table.

A pair of satanic birds sat on a rail close by, planning some devilry; and one dishevelled ruffian hopped sideways along the ground towards the chair, knowing well that a man can be approached with impunity when his legs are up on the rests of a chair.

The two birds on the rail watched the man at every possible angle of their heads. One of the pair bounced round on the perch and tried another view between his legs; then sharpened his beak and his wits. "Chee,

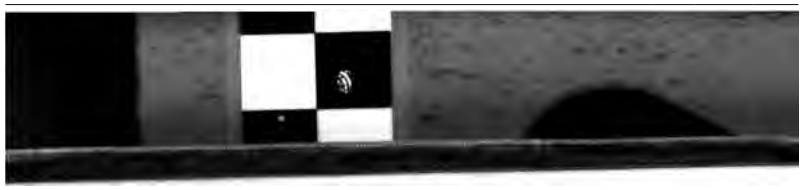
kraw," he hoarsely whispered to the ruffian on the ground.

There was evidently some conspiracy hatching. The bird on the ground hopped a bit closer, and shouted "Kee-ah!" in an impertinent voice, with an insolent flirt of his wings.

The man's foot wagged. The crow jumped into the air and landed a yard away. A "Ca, kee-ah!" of derision from the onlookers in the tree put him on his mettle, and he swaggered forward again. To show his composure he marched almost up to the chair, and examined the ground microscopically with one eye. With careful exactitude he picked up an ant by the middle of its chest, pinched it, laid it on its back, and counted its legs; then, lifting it up in the tip of his beak, he jerked it into his cavernous throat. Shutting his beak with a snap, he threw out his chest like one who has accomplished his purpose.

The man leaned out of the chair and picked up a pebble. It was a fatal move. When his head was below the table the two birds who had been waiting on the rail made a dash for the tea-tray. One stuck his head in the milk-jug, while the other flew off with a slab of toast.

"Kaw, chee, keeah!" (Hi, look out, well



done!) the onlooking crows yelled from the tree.

The stone flew wide of the mark, because the mark jumped aside—an expostulating bunch of indignant feathers, beak, and claws. Several other crows flew down to the ground and stood at a distance with legs astride and taunting manner, shouting abuse and the coarsest language picked up in the bazaar.

Suddenly the whole assemblage broke up as a crunching boot-step approached along the gravel-path.

"Hullo, Jackson! it's like old times to see you here."

"Wood!" Jackson exclaimed, springing out of his chair. "You are just the man I want. (Ho, Squirrel, bring another chair, more tea, whisky, cheroots — everything you can lay hands on.) Wood, do you know, I have not seen anything of you since that awful day when you brought me down from the jungle and packed me in the hospital, and that was three months ago!"

"I confess that is so," Wood replied, as he doubled his long body down in the chair that Squirrel had industriously dragged forward. "You were in a bad state when I left you. The doctor said you would be all right, and as I had some very important business else-

where, I abandoned you, I am ashamed to say. I hope you have forgiven me."

"My good fellow! I can never tell you how much——"

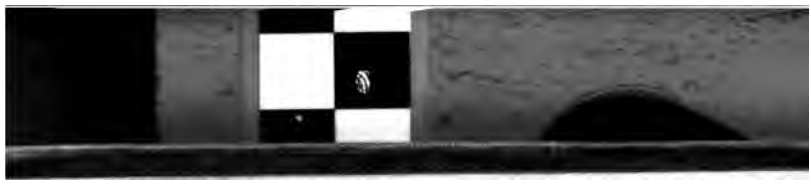
"Tut, tut"—Wood interrupted the burst of gratitude—"never mind that. Let's see what sort of a job they have made of that hand of yours. H'm—it doesn't look so bad after all. The doctor was good enough to compliment me on my surgical skill. But that bullet-wound at the side of your head—that was a near touch."

"It was a bullet-wound, then?" Jackson said, with a touch of relief. "How did it happen?"

Wood lit a cheroot, settled back in his chair, and briefly related the facts that had come to his knowledge.

At the end of the narrative Jackson fingered the scar at the back of his head. "So that was a revolver shot that carried away two of my fingers and skimmed along the side of my head," he said thoughtfully. "Well, I bear the man no grudge, for I shot him first; though, of course, it was a pure accident, and all his own fault. But who was the fellow?"

"Nobody seems to know anything about him," Wood replied, "except that he held



himself out as a missionary and was making a living out of the simple, confiding Karens. It seems, however, that he was masquerading as a missionary merely in order to put the police off the scent while he looked about for an easy road to fortune. Then he hatched this plan of scaring the villagers to death by dressing up in a tiger-skin, so that he could rob them without interference."

"And poor old Ba Saw!" Jackson mused. "I'm sorry he's gone. By the way, I was taking a walk round the pagoda to-day, and I saw a woman that I am sure was Ba Saw's wife, Pwā Cho. She wore the uniform of a Buddhist nun, but I recognised her at once—there is something about her eyes that one can't forget. She was carrying a baby—an unusual occupation for a nun. She smiled and laughed as she played with the kid, and told me that she was not in need of anything."

Wood smoked in silence for a time; then suddenly exclaimed, "Well, now to business!"

"What business?"

"The same that brought me to Tanbin."

"Oh, ah. How was it that you turned up——"

"To tell you that I have found a fortune." Wood paused to relight his cheroot. "Yes, gold. Hang on a bit, and I will tell you the

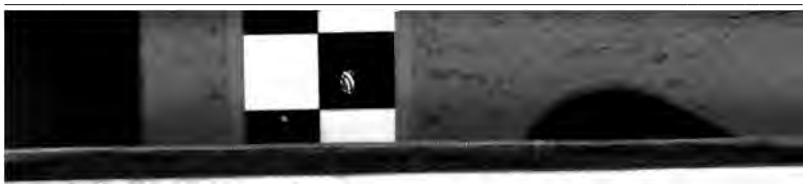
whole story." He settled himself comfortably in the chair.

"I've been dredging the Irawadi," he remarked, as he turned his cheroot round and blew at the red-hot end:—

"Everybody knows there is gold in the sand of the Irawadi, but nobody seems to have thought it worth while to dredge and wash the sand in the middle of the river. Naturally, that's just the place where the gold, being heavy, would settle. And for that reason I took out a licence, bought an old paddy-barge, got together a gang of Chinamen and coolies, and started scratching up the bottom of the river with a clumsy, bamboo contrivance.

"I dug a fair-sized hole in the bottom of the river (the Flotilla Company will tell you about that), and at last things seemed a bit hopeful. I struck camp and went further up the river. The higher I went, the better were the results. I pushed up the river right into unexplored territory at the back of the Kachin country, and the gold got thicker and thicker.

"At last I found the source of this stream of gold. The sand was simply heavy with it! But that night my gang of savages mutinied. They had hatched a plan to throw me overboard and work on their own account. There



was a fight. It didn't last long. They all tumbled into the canoes alongside, and were away down stream, leaving me marooned on this old barge.

"Next day the river rose rapidly, and it was no use going on with the work single-handed; so I cut adrift and floated down to Myitchina, and thence came on to Rangoon. I careered away to Tanbin to find you, but you were not in a fit state to listen to anything. Then, after you were safely tucked up in hospital, I set to work collecting a proper outfit—steam-tug, dredger, and a patent washing contrivance of my own invention. They are all up at Myitchina, and now I am waiting till the cold weather when the river falls again. All I want is a confederate. Will you join me?"

Jackson rose half way out of his chair; but let himself sink slowly back again, saying, "My dear fellow, it is awfully good of you to think of me, but I'm afraid I cannot put any money into the concern. To tell you the truth, I am practically bankrupt."

"Tut, tut; there's no money wanted!" Wood exclaimed. I have done all that myself and—and you can pay me back your half when we have got our fortunes; there's enough for both of us."

Jackson smoked furiously for fully a minute;

then he held up his left hand, and said gruffly, "I'm not so useful as another man would be."

"Nonsense! I have been watching you use that hand, and it's good enough. Besides, your right hand is as sound as any man's—give it to me, and shake on the bargain.

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